2nd Edition



The Art of Black and White Photography

Torsten Andreas Hoffmann

Techniques for Creating Superb Images in a Digital Workflow

rockynook

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Introduction

Digital photography has conquered the market at breakneck speed despite the fact that in the early years of the technology, professional photographers eyed its development with skepticism. As photographers migrated from analog to digital, they suffered through more than their share of growing pains, struggling with the new technology and doubting its viability. The following questions were among those being asked:

- Is it actually possible to make large, quality prints from digital images?
- Don’t digital photos look artificial?
- Do the colors look natural?
- How does digitalization affect black and white photography?

In order to answer these questions and to get acquainted with digital photography, one thing was certain: it was necessary for photographers to devote time to learn about the technology. Not only was it essential for photographers to become familiar with a new, and rather complex camera technology, it was also necessary to thoroughly understand the new image manipulation programs. Many photographers initially shied away from these efforts, and as a result, traditional analog photography had to be defended by those who had not even acquired an in-depth knowledge of the digital process.

The Image in the Digital Age

Many textbooks have been written about digital cameras, digital technology, and the latest image manipulation programs, which are meant to facilitate both amateurs and professionals as they transition from analog to digital. However, one aspect seems to have been almost forgotten in the process: Digital photography goes beyond the technical and is also about images and their content—about moods and their formal arrangements. This book will help you become familiar with digital photography and focus again on the image in the digital age.

Images have their own special language and primordial laws. Black and white photography is a medium that begs to be artistically shaped in both digital

and analog photography. Certainly, digital photography technology appears complicated and must be mastered, but the technology of photography should not always be the main subject; rather, the technology should only serve to guide you toward the end result of expressive, artistic images.

Apart from the technical aspects of production, whether a picture was taken in analog or digital format is completely irrelevant to the presentation of the image. Therefore, to help you learn about image composition, several of the examples included in this book were produced through analog photography. While this book forgoes specifying the processes used to create analog images, it does provide information on the technical procedures used to create each digital photograph.

Needless to say, although this book deals with digital technology and provides you with essential technical information explained in simple terms, it is primarily an advanced guide to image composition. Thus, the first and longest part of this book deals mostly with content-related subjects such as landscape, architectural, portrait, and street photography. For each of these subjects, well-known examples from historical and current photography are mentioned with the aim of motivating you to go beyond this book and delve further into these subjects.

The second, larger part of this book deals extensively with the classic rules of image composition such as the golden ratio, triangular composition, image tension, and so on. This part of the book teaches the essentials of image analysis; however, you should not view the rules of composition as recipes to be strictly followed. On the contrary, after you have absorbed these compositional rules, you will be reminded not to adhere to them at all times; rather, you should feel free to discard them when it suits your purpose, and, in the best-case scenario, apply them to develop your own pictorial language.

Technical Information in this Book

Analog black and white technique is taken for granted and is not explained in this book, but with every digital image included, the technical procedure is briefly explained. Some chapters in this book are devoted to important technical information:

- The quality and features of digital cameras
- The processes of shooting in RAW mode
- Photoshop techniques that you really need for manipulating the perfect digital

black and white photo, explained in a simple way

Emphasize Expression

Throughout this book you will be repeatedly reminded that photography is about learning to see, to compose an image, and to think pictorially. In a nutshell, this book will stimulate you to analyze images in-depth and will motivate you to find your own photographic style. To accomplish this, my photographs are used as examples to communicate the diversity of pictorial language. The knowledge you gain from the information this book provides can be transferred to other totally unrelated subjects.

One thing is certain, however: With digital photography, although the increasingly difficult techniques must be mastered, technology should never become an end in itself. It is precisely because of this that it is so important to stress that photography is not preeminently about technique but rather images with content that expresses the photographer’s consciousness while being created in an interesting way. And that is what this book is about.

Section 1 Tools and Fundamentals



1 Choosing a Good Digital Camera

In analog photography, the camera does not have the essential importance often attributed to it. It is the quality of the lens that is paramount, because the optical system and the type of film used are mostly responsible for a technically satisfactory image quality. These things are completely different in digital photography, where it is the quality of the camera sensor that determines image quality as much as the optical system. Therefore, most of the time—and in contrast to analog photography—the latest camera sensor model is in fact often the best one as well. Digital photography has evolved so much in recent years that high-quality images have become a reality; something that even a few years ago was by no means the case.

When digital cameras were in their infancy, three megapixels were insufficient to allow for significant enlargements. There were other problems too: image noise in night photos, moiré effects in delicate graphic structures, unnatural colors, color fringing in photo edges, and above all very slight burnt-out lights in backlit situations, making backlit photos almost impossible to shoot. In addition, shutter release delay was a problem in the early days of digital photography, making it totally useless for snapshots.

Meanwhile, all the problems mentioned above have been largely resolved. Small-frame sensors now have an average resolution of between 12 and 24 megapixels. Digital backs for medium-format cameras currently have resolutions of 60 million pixels and more. These are magnitudes of resolution that an amateur doesn’t need and that only make sense if you intend to print images at least 10 feet long.

Full Format Sensors

When this book was beeing written, the full-format sensors developed by Canon, Nikon, and Sony deliver such outstanding results when used with high-quality, wide-angle lenses that the images come close to the quality once only achievable with a 6 × 4.5 cm medium-format camera. This is the reason many pros have switched to these digital single-lens reflex (DSLR) cameras equipped with full-format sensors initially developed by Canon. Their advantage becomes especially noticeable in large prints made from wide-angle photos. Their

disadvantage is the clear vignetting of the full-format sensor under full aperture, but this problem can also be eliminated by slightly stopping down or by using the Photoshop lens correction filter, so there is no real argument against the full-format sensor.

Which Sensor Should You Use?

On the other hand, if you do not need to shoot with extremely wide angles or make enlargements of up to 12” × 18”, most active pixel sensors used with good lenses will also provide reasonably good image quality. As a matter of fact, they are even advantageous with respect to the full-format sensor when used in the telephoto range because a 200 mm lens becomes a 300 mm lens but has the more compact design and the larger depth of field of the 200 mm lens. I once again recommend a camera equipped with an APS sensor, particularly for photographing animals, for example. Needless to say, much of this becomes a price issue. At the time of this book’s publication, the best camera for the money equipped with a full-format sensor is the Canon EOS 5D Mark II, which costs approximately $2,700. This camera (with its 21.1 megapixels) in combination with good Canon L lenses allows for enlargements of almost 3 × 4½ feet if you also interpolate the pixels a bit. (You can add on 50% more pixels, for example, to define the same image using Photoshop’s “image size.”) If you want to enlarge poster-size prints up to 16″ × 24″, cameras with a lower pixel number are sufficient. Image quality will be considerably superior to the results obtainable with any analog 35 mm camera using 100 ASA film. Other reasons to use an APS sensor include the excellent subsequent sharpening tools available for it and the fact that image noise at 100 ASA is substantially lower than the grain of a 100 ASA small-format film.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Compact Cameras

The issue now arises regarding the advantages and disadvantages of compact cameras. A clear advantage of compact cameras as opposed to single-lens reflex (SLR) cameras equipped with interchangeable lenses is that the compact camera sensors cannot get dirty, whereas with digital single-lens reflex cameras you may be constantly battling dust. Although manufacturers have invented vibrating protective coatings, it will nevertheless be almost impossible for a camera with interchangeable lenses to work totally dust-free. The problem isn’t

as severe as you might expect because you can easily clean the sensors (or the low-pass filters placed before the sensor), and it is easy to retouch small visible dust particles with Photoshop.

Compact cameras are generally equipped with zoom lenses that cover a large focal length range. They are sufficient for amateur purposes, but such a zoom lens has, for the most part, disadvantages and is therefore insufficient for professional standards. Conversely, with a DSLR camera, you can use several zoom lenses for only the smaller focal length ranges and still achieve a higher image quality.

Generally speaking, most camera and lens manufacturers have invested a great deal more money and energy in the last couple of years in the development of zoom lenses than in the development of fixed focal lengths. Therefore, the quality of zoom lenses has improved so much that I can recommend many of them even for the most challenging tasks. The weaknesses of zoom lenses appear more in the distorted edges of the image than in deficient sharpness. This distortion could pose a problem for architectural photography, but this limitation has been overcome with Photoshop, which allows you to compensate for distortions with the distortion filter and the “diaphragm or lens correction” mode. In addition, you can download various so-called “plug-ins” from the Internet with which you can correct on-screen almost any lens available on the market. These correction possibilities are so good that they cannot be noticed later as artificial. Nowadays, you can even tackle professional architectural photography with digital single-lens reflex cameras and zoom lenses.

In summary, it can be said that if very high quality is expected from the image, even with extremely wide angles, there is hardly a way around a single-lens reflex camera with a full-format sensor and high quality lenses. If your requirements are a bit lower, cameras with an APS sensor and high-quality zoom lenses are sufficient. If you demand an advanced amateur level from the image quality and you rarely need prints larger than 12″ × 16″, a compact camera equipped with a good zoom lens (from Leica, for example) can be quite acceptable.

2 An Essential Rule for Digital Black and White Photography: Always Photograph in RAW Mode

If you are just beginning to photograph digitally, you may be pleasantly surprised at the high-quality images that a good camera is capable of, even in the compressed JPEG format. For most situations, a skillfully taken photo in compressed JPEG mode is good enough at first glance. For the sake of convenience, it's tempting to stay with this format because it uses up a lot less memory and there is no need to determine which RAW converter to load onto the computer. However, to surrender to convenience is a mistake in spite of the apparently satisfactory image quality of the JPEG format. This is especially important for black and white photography. Most of the high-end digital cameras have—in addition to the JPEG and sometimes the TIFF formats—the option of photographing in the so-called RAW mode. As the name indicates, all available RAW data is saved the moment you take the photo. Numerous automatic image-editing functions such as white balance, sharpening, and tone value correction are eliminated at first. Instead, the data is generally stored with 12-bit or even 16-bit color depth, as opposed to the 8 bits of JPEG mode. This greater color depth means a considerably wider tonal range. In order to open the data photographed in RAW mode, a RAW converter is needed. And this is where, unfortunately, every manufacturer clings to its own proprietary and very secret concoction. Although Adobe has suggested developing a uniform RAW format, the large manufacturers such as Canon and Nikon still won't have anything to do with it. And yet, when it comes to optimum image quality, there is no way around using the RAW format: Photographs taken with this format have considerably better light scope, which means that photos shot in RAW format reproduce the brightest spots and the darkest shadows in backlit images more faithfully than photos taken in JPEG format. Thus, backlit skies taken in RAW format not only have more natural colors, they also have better differentiation.

Let's look at two photos of a paraglider:

In the photo taken in JPEG mode (figure 2–1), the lit areas are not well differentiated and are partly washed out, despite having used a gradient filter that

gradually darkens the sky toward the top—a typical phenomenon from the beginnings of digital photography that made good backlit photos almost impossible.



Figure 2–1

When you now look at the image captured simultaneously in RAW mode (figure 2–2) with exactly the same image data, you will see that all lit areas are still very well differentiated and traced. And that is precisely the point when it comes to a digitally-taken backlit photo: If the lights in the image are “washed out,” you cannot subsequently improve it.



Figure 2–2

For this reason, it is especially important in backlit photos to use the black or red blinking information indicator on your camera’s liquid crystal display (LCD), available on most good digital cameras, to see in the display what sections have possibly washed-out lit areas. If you photograph in RAW mode, you can correct an underexposed photo by brightening the underexposed areas with the RAW converter. By the way, the advantage of the RAW mode in backlit

images applies to both black and white and color photography. However, for black and white photography there is one especially important criterion which demands that a photo be taken in RAW mode: You will later learn that it often makes sense to convert photos that should have a dramatic, high-contrast sky using the Photoshop yellow filter preset to subtract a major portion of the blue tones. But when you do this with a photo taken in JPEG (even if it looked good in color), its tonal values will develop dirty transitions and an unpleasant image noise that you will clearly recognize in bigger enlargements. On the other hand, a TIFF file that originated in RAW mode can handle a conversion using the yellow filter preset or one that subtracts a high proportion of the blue tones and retains fine tonal transitions and little image noise.

Let's look at an example. In the photo of the volcanic island of Lanzarote (figure 2–3), the task was to convert the sky to a higher contrast black and white. The best result was obtained by using the yellow filter preset during conversion. If the sky had been slightly hazy, a polarizing filter in a crossed (90°) position and the yellow filter preset would create a nice, contrasty black and white image. If you enlarge this image 100% and crop it (figure 2–4), you will see how little image noise there is in the TIFF file converted from RAW format. If you take exactly the same steps with an identical photo in JPEG format, you will see that the same crop enlarged by 100% (figure 2–5) has much more image noise and a much rougher transition in the gray tones. The difference can be readily seen in 16″ × 24″ prints. Therefore, the following rule applies especially for fine art prints: Always photograph in RAW mode and print from a TIFF file because although TIFF takes up to five times more memory than JPEG, the results are worth the required memory space. In addition, there are good external hard disks with almost unlimited memory capacity (Lacie, for example) that are more economical than the corresponding number of films would have been.



Figure 2–3



Figure 2–4 TIFF file converted from RAW format



Figure 2–5 JPEG format

It is essential to work with a high-quality RAW converter. Photoshop's built-in converter has some obvious weaknesses when it comes to making extreme enlargements—for example, it often produces zigzags in high-contrast lines that

are not present in the JPEG original. The best RAW converter I have tested is Phase One's Capture One. The package shows none of the inherent weaknesses that Photoshop displays and produces excellent-quality files for making large-format enlargements.

3 Drama through the Use of Filters

Various colored filters are used in analog black and white photography to change and determine gray scale distribution and subject contrast. Good digital cameras calculate this filter effect. Which filters should you use when photographing digitally in color mode?

In analog black and white photography, filters influence the translation of the various colors to gray values and consequently affect contrast as well. The most important color filters are yellow, orange, red, green, and blue.

Essentially, a filter allows the light waves of its own color to pass through but absorbs the light of its complementary color. For black and white photography, this means that colors in the image that are the same as the filter appear brighter in the photo, whereas those of the complementary color appear darker. The following colors are complementary: red and blue green, orange and blue, yellow and purple blue, yellow green and purple, green and purple red.

Filters are particularly useful in analog landscape photography, and Ansel Adams is the premier practitioner of this technique. His most famous photograph, *Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico,* would not have had such a dark sky without the help of a red filter. As a matter of fact, he took most of his landscape photographs with filters.

The so-called blue-absorbing filters are extremely useful for landscape and architectural photography because they darken the sky. After yellow and orange filters, the red filter is the strongest variant of a blue-absorbing filter. It has a marked effect not only on the sky, but on other exterior objects as well. Light at noon, for example, has a very high color temperature, so a red filter darkens the sky and the objects that reflect the blue of the sky; shadows especially are often infused with blue light, but our eyes do not notice this effect. Thus, in a photo taken with a red filter, shadows will appear darker. A red filter also reproduces green in a darker tone, because green is the complementary color of red. With regard to design, it can be said that red filters generally create images with considerably darker areas than images taken without them. However, when used properly, this filter creates a kind of magic because it magically brings out light from the darkness. Thus, it creates a pictorial effect that is similar in style to the effects used by painters like Rembrandt, and especially Caravaggio. Nevertheless, the danger with the red filter is that shadows can “drown,” so it’s a

good idea to overexpose photos taken with this filter. A red filter swallows almost two apertures, so a tripod is often a must.

On the other hand, a yellow filter swallows only half an aperture, but it doesn't darken the sky as much. In analog black and white photography, a yellow filter is a good all-around filter.

If you want to photograph a very green landscape, a green filter would be a good choice because it brightens the green of the landscape and darkens the sky, at least somewhat.

Some photography schools also recommend placing two filters on top of one another, such as a red filter plus a polarizing filter. But I don't think it's a good idea because each additional filter causes a loss of image quality, albeit a very slight one. Because color filters are generally screwed onto the lens and, therefore, become another lens element, this is not the time to save money and buy a cheap product. With some very long telephoto lenses, you can also screw the filter onto the back of the lens. If possible, all filters should be from a well-known manufacturer and feature good antireflective coating so they reflect as little light as possible and, therefore, do not lengthen exposure time unnecessarily.

Examples of Color Filter Effects—The Same Subject Photographed with Different Filters

With the help of a landscape photo taken of the Atlantic Ocean from the island of La Palma, let's look at the effects that the most important filters have on analog photography. Yellow, red, and green filters are, in my opinion, part of the essential equipment that an ambitious black and white photographer should have. The prints shown in figure 3–1 through figure 3–4 were enlarged on grade 3 paper with the same exposure times and without any burning. They show very clearly the effects of these three important filters, but no enlargement looks convincing without extensive, additional manipulation. This example reminds us that for enlargements, image postprocessing is at least as important as filter use. The best procedure is to use both because they supplement each other.

The unfiltered photo (figure 3–1) is unsatisfactory because the pretty clouds in the sky appear too pale and lack contrast.



Figure 3–1 Unfiltered image

The photo taken with a yellow filter (figure 3–2) shows a little more contrast in the sky that could look okay with some subsequent manipulation of exposure, but then the blue sea would look darker compared to the trunk of the exotic tree.



Figure 3–2 Yellow filter used

The image taken with a red filter (figure 3–3) shows a dramatic, contrasty sky without subsequent exposure correction, but the blue-green sea that is complementary to the color of the filter becomes so dark that it can no longer be distinguished from the tree trunk.

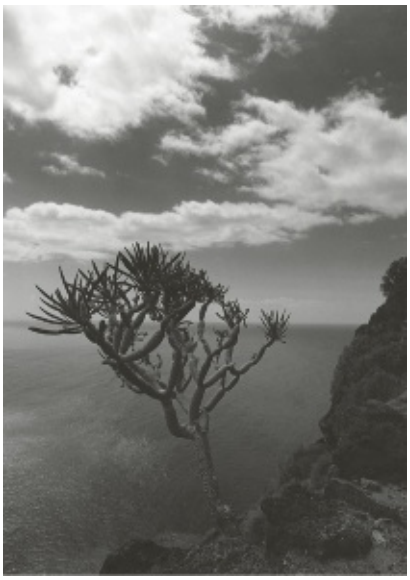


Figure 3–3 Red filter used

A very different effect is achieved with the green filter (figure 3–4). The blue-green light of the sea is not absorbed (as was the case with the red filter), but almost all of it passes through the filter and, therefore, makes the sea appear brighter. The tree trunk and the leaves also look brighter and more differentiated than in all previous photos. Only the sky leaves something to be desired and still has a somewhat lower contrast than in the photo taken with the yellow filter.



Figure 3–4 Green filter used

The previous examples clearly show how strongly you can determine tonal

values in a black and white photo. If you want a rather dark image in which only the clouds stand out brightly, then I recommend using a red filter and dodging the lower part a little bit (figure 3–5). You can see that differentiations remain all over the negative, yet the tones of the tree trunk can barely be distinguished from the tones of the sea.

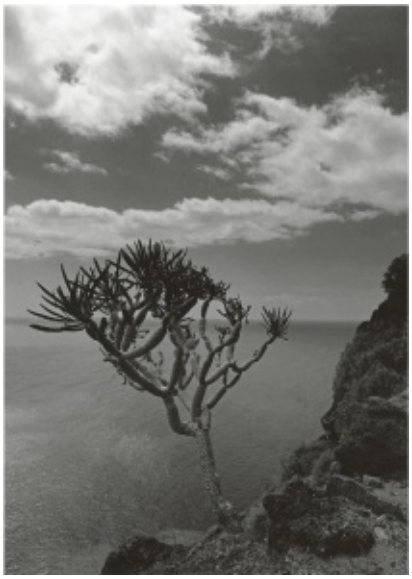


Figure 3–5 With red filter and dodging lower part

If, on the contrary, you want a bright image in which the sea stands out, I recommend taking the photo with a green filter and then burning in the sky in the darkroom (figure 3–6). Now, the tonal values of all areas are clearly separated and differentiated; even the green tones in the landscape's lower-right corner are noticeably more brilliant than in the photo taken with a red filter. This is certainly the photo that does the most justice to the subject.

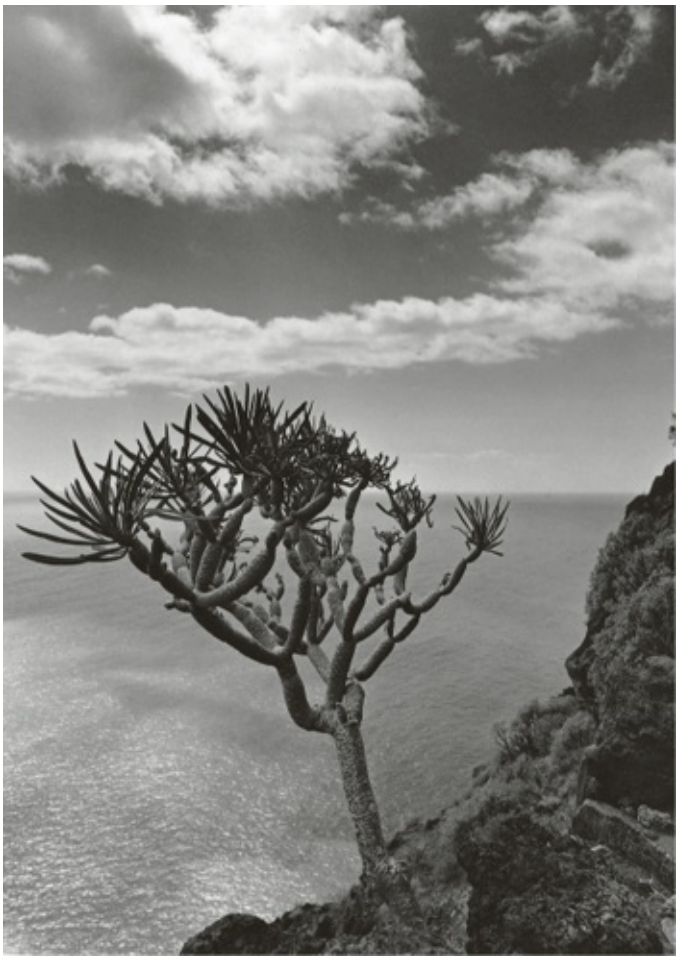


Figure 3–6 With green filter and burning in the sky

Filters in Digital Photography

Using filters in digital photography is completely different than in analog photography: The color filters just described lose their effect, lead to flat images, and are therefore useless in digital photography. Good digital cameras have a black and white mode that applies the effect of yellow, orange, or red filters. However, I still recommend shooting in color mode and later using Photoshop's many tools to make your conversions. Starting with Photoshop CS3, however, the effects of yellow, green, blue, and two different red filters can be simulated when converting to black and white. Here, I'll deal with the most suitable filters for photographing digitally. Naturally, ultraviolet (UV) and skylight filters should be mentioned in digital photography:

• The UV filter blocks out the ultraviolet light that causes some lack of

sharpness.

- The skylight filter is a very slight conversion filter with a smooth pink tone that lowers color temperature a little bit, thus giving a pleasant, warmer color tone in photos taken at noon with a blue sky.

However, conversion filters such as these are useful mostly in analog photography because digital cameras have a white balance adjustment. The most prevalent filters are the bluish KB filters that increase color temperature, the reddish KR filters that throttle color temperature, and the FL filters that eliminate the green cast of fluorescent lights. But, as a digital photographer, you might as well forget all about them.

The Polarizing Filter

Mainly, two filters are a must in digital black and white photography: the polarizing filter and the gradient filter. *(Note: The gradient filter is discussed later in this chapter.)*

The most widely used filter is the polarizing filter, and its effect should already be well known. By rotating the filter in a cross position (i. e., at 90° with respect to the subject), two kinds of polarizing light are especially blocked: reflections of nonmetallic objects and the sky's polarized light vibrations, thus intensifying the contrast between sky and clouds. Whereas light waves normally propagate by oscillating as a bundle around an axis on many planes going in one direction, polarized light oscillates only on one plane. To simplify matters, the polarizing filter can be understood as an infinite number of small mailbox slots that, in the instant in which they are perpendicular to the oscillating plane of polarized light, filter it out almost entirely. After all, the oscillations cannot pass through the "mailbox slots" positioned obliquely to the polarization plane.

In practice, the polarizing filter has two main effects: First, it intensifies the object's actual colors (almost all objects are more or less suffused by scattered light, and this scattered light lies on top, so to speak, of the object's actual color as a slight veil). Second, because these reflections are polarized light beams, the polarizing filter filters them out and the object's actual color becomes more apparent.

There are also many polarized light beams that scatter the light in the atmosphere and make the sky look brighter, especially in hazy conditions. This scattered light is also filtered out by the polarizing filter, especially when the camera is held at a 90° angle with respect to the sun. The sky appears a lot

darker, almost black, but the clouds remain bright, thus intensifying the contrast between sky and clouds.

You can now transform the sky—which already has a higher contrast owing to the polarizing filter—using the various Photoshop presets to perfectly imitate the effect of a red, orange, or yellow filter. You can even digitally re-create an infrared filter effect, although not as thoroughly as a red filter effect.

Creating Digital Drama Using Photoshop

You can achieve the dramatic effect conveyed by an orange or red filter digitally. Figure 3–7 was taken with a Canon EOS 5D and a 17–40 mm lens at a 17 mm focal length. Although this camera has a red filter simulation for black and white mode, it is better to turn the polarizing filter to the cross position and photograph in color mode, as recommended earlier. During conversion to black and white, you can control the effects of the blue-absorbing filters more precisely using Photoshop. Thus, you can simulate the effect of an analog yellow, orange, or red filter as in this color photo of a gigantic wave in Lanzarote. If you were to convert the image to black and white without applying any filters (figure 3–7), the sky would remain relatively bright compared to the original color photo, but the polarizing filter effect would make it a little darker with respect to reality. If you want to achieve a yellow filter effect, you can simply select the appropriate preset in the Photoshop conversion tool. This brightens the yellow and red tones while significantly darkening the blue component (figure 3–8). This is the most convincing image because it has a strong contrast coupled with a dark and dramatic sky. The photo with a red filter effect (figure 3–9) is almost a little too dramatic; some may think the sky is too black.



Figure 3–7 Conversion without filter effects



Figure 3–8 Conversion with yellow filter effect



Figure 3–9 Conversion with red filter effect

Unfortunately, with photos not taken in RAW format the gray-scale tonality in the sky is no longer smooth enough after the contrasty transformation produced by color filter presets. But even in this case, you can mask this undesired effect using Photoshop tools.

A sky with a slightly unsteady tonal gradient is barely noticeable if you add grain structure to the image. A size 14 grain structure with 50% contrast comes quite close to an analog image taken with 100 ASA film. Once you have converted a photo to black and white, the grain still appears in color, making it

necessary to eliminate the color effect using the “reduce saturation” tool, even if you already processed the image in black and white. This is only an emergency measure; it is better to photograph in RAW format in the first place because then the transitions remain smooth if you convert your images using filter presets.

In this image, the attachment point for the rope is included in this photo to serve as a graphically interesting element in the composition because, without it, an essential fixed point for the eye would be lacking.

Infrared Simulation in Photoshop

Photoshop can be used to produce relatively convincing infrared photo effects. However, contrary to the simulation of blue-absorbing filters, infrared simulation is not really convincing with every subject. Let’s look at two examples that really cry out for a touch of infrared.

Example One

If you use the Photoshop infrared conversion preset, objects often lose sharpness. In infrared photography, this effect is especially sought after because infrared film reacts with chlorophyll in the green of leaves. If a subject you have converted using the infrared preset appears unsharp or burned out, you can simply adjust each color channel separately until detail once again becomes visible. If you are still experiencing a lack of sharpness, applying a coarse grain effect can also help to remedy the situation. I recommend a size of 50 for the grain structure placed over the image. (Clicking “reduce saturation” will convert it again to black and white.) Such a coarse grain (size 50) is characteristic of infrared film. The created image (figure 3–11) is quite attractive. The green of the trees, and especially the grasses in the meadow, are much brighter than in the image converted without using filter effects (figure 3–10). The overall impression of this park in Fürstenlager Auerbach in the south of Germany is rather mysterious, almost mystical. The trees look as if they will lay down on the hollow, as if they are taken with a fisheye lens. In fact, the trees were crooked and this is the result of using a full-format Canon EOS 5D camera with a 17 mm wide-angle lens.



Figure 3–10 Conversion without filter effects



Figure 3–11 Conversion with infrared filter effect and added grain

Example Two: Infrared Adds a Mystical Effect

The infrared effect is even more suitable for this old Irish ruin (figure 3–13). Here, the brightening effect of the green as opposed to the image converted without using a color filter effect (figure 3–12) is more easily seen.

If you look at the detail in the grass, you can notice that—as opposed to the image of the grass converted to gray tones (figure 3–14)—the detail has lost resolution and looks outshone (figure 3–15). This effect closely resembles an

infrared representation and fits the character of this old ruin found in south-western Ireland very well; the mystical effect of the ruin has been increased a great deal. The photo was taken with the 17 mm focal length of a 17–40 mm lens and a Canon EOS 5D.



Figure 3–12 Conversion without filter effects



Figure 3–13 Conversion with infrared filter effect



Figure 3–14 Conversion without filter effects (detail)



Figure 3–15 Conversion with infrared filter effect (detail)

You can still find many enchanting and untouched ruins in Ireland. These ruins are relics from the past, from another era, in which the mystery of time can still be clearly felt. The infrared effect enhances this mysterious impression.

The Gradient Filter

Surprisingly, the gradient filter is rarely used, but it is virtually essential for digital photography. The color of a gradient filter starts in the middle of the filter and becomes denser toward the top. In typical filters, the difference between coated and clear surfaces is one to two aperture stops. I recommend neutral gray filters with a 2-stop rating because they achieve a pleasant light balance in backlit conditions. In principle, the gradient filter is used especially in landscape photography to balance the considerable difference in brightness between sky and foreground, especially under backlit conditions. A gradient filter is primarily useful when the skyline is not crooked because all elements jutting above the skyline (skyscrapers, for example) will also be gradually darkened—

an undesirable effect. Naturally, you can brighten the elements again in both analog printing and digital processing with the dodging technique.

The gradient filter is unjustifiably included with effect filters, but generally you can barely notice its “effect.” Used correctly, the gradient filter achieves no more than adding detail to a sky that lacks detail in backlit photos. In analog photography the gradient filter is often indispensable, especially when using slide film because the image cannot be subsequently manipulated any further, at least not without digitizing.

A risk in digital photography is that lit areas can burn out in backlit situations, thus losing all their detail. This risk is greater than when you use a good film. Therefore, when you take a backlit photo such as this one (figure 3–16), a gradient filter is essential. Without a gradient filter, all the clouds in the sky lose their detail and not even Photoshop can restore it. The photo taken with a gradient filter (figure 3–17) shows the difference: Although the brightest areas in the clouds have some detail, the lower part of the image is not darker. The photo has the right amount of drama because the bright clouds create an oval-shaped frame over the sunken ship.

When buying a gradient filter, I recommend a disc type that you can simply place in front of the lens to precisely set the gradient. Another option is an adapter that you can screw onto the filter thread. This type of adapter has a support for the gradient disc so you can displace it upward or downward as needed. The Cokin Company makes good, economical gradient filters.



Figure 3–16 Without the use of a gradient filter



Figure 3–17 With the use of a gradient filter

You can use a gradient filter to add drama to a picture that otherwise would have been rather gray and boring. The lighthouse of Westerhever near St. Peter Ording has often been used in advertisements, but on a gray day the sky certainly doesn't provide much drama (figure 3–18). No problem: The gradient filter adds drama. You can place the filter higher or lower to enhance or lessen the dramatic effect of the sky (figure 3–19). As a result, the photo of the Westerhever lighthouse has drama and depth.



Figure 3–18 Without the use of a gradient filter



Figure 3–19 With the use of a gradient filter

Section 2 Photographic Genres and Concepts



4 Overcoming Clichéd Photos

After the previous brief yet important technical discussion, you are ready to focus your attention on the most essential element—the image!

If you want to improve your photographic skills, ask yourself if something is worth photographing. Think about what you really want to express in your photographs. You may be tempted to photograph clichés, such as the Cathedral in Cologne, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, and the Brooklyn Bridge in New York.

What characterizes a clichéd photo? A clichéd photograph is a shortened, simplified reproduction of a popular idea or image; it's a poor copy, an imitation. Clichéd images do not need to be profoundly experienced by the photographer or audience, and they do not result from original thinking. Postcards are the best example of clichéd photos, generally showing popular urban attractions that are always under a clear blue sky.

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cliché: *A phrase, expression, or idea that has been overused to the point of losing its intended force or novelty, especially when at some time it was considered distinctively forceful or novel.*

Clichéd photos quickly lose their effect. Andy Warhol's photographs very clearly demonstrate this rapid loss with his serially reproduced Mona Lisa: The more often an image is reproduced, the more it will lose its power. This rule is indeed true in times of a pictorial deluge; as a photographer, you cannot take this seriously enough. The endless Mona Lisa reproductions have almost degraded the original painting to a cliché. As a photographer, I advise you not to add more clichéd images of the world to the almost infinite number that already exist, but liberate yourself from such clichés.

Be honest and ask yourself: When am I tempted to photograph a popular image and when is a photograph my own original image? You can liberate yourself from photographing clichés by answering the following personal questions:

- What really interests and fascinates me?
- In what facets of the exterior world do I most likely find myself?

• What are my most prominent emotions?

Photography can express your feelings because for every emotional and mental facet, you can find the corresponding facets in the external world. When you understand photography from this perspective, you automatically stop producing clichéd images.

A photo always shows two qualities:

• It shows an authentic instant in the exterior world.

• It shows the photographer's inner world of feelings and ideas.

"Everyone walks toward the image carried within," photographer Edouard Boubat once remarked. A painter tries to bring inner images to the canvas, while the photographer finds places in the world that resemble his internal images. The outstanding black and white photographer Robert Hausser always relied on his "gut feeling" to find places in the world that expressed his inner world.

Reduction Instead of Postcard Cliché

If you really want to photograph popular attractions, the way in which you photograph them is important. When you photograph common attractions, the reduction of form and color can make a photograph far superior to the clichéd image.

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reduction: *The rewriting of an expression into a simpler form. The act of reducing complexity.*

For example, almost every postcard portrays Cologne Cathedral with the adjacent St. Martin's church included in the image (figure 4–1). However, a reduced perspective of the cathedral is much less common (figure 4–2). You could photograph the cathedral with a 100 mm telephoto lens in the morning light to make the popular image, or you could take a better photograph by reducing the perspective and shooting with a 200 mm telephoto lens at dusk from the same location with the bright sky behind the cathedral. The improved photograph portrays the spires of Cologne Cathedral and adjacent St. Martin's church silhouetted against the almost monochromatic gray sky. It is unquestionable that this image with its extreme reduction in form and tonal values is far superior to the popular image. It also shows how similar a clichéd

photo and an artistic abstraction can be to each other: They both use the same perspective, but each uses a different optical system and lighting.



Figure 4–1



Figure 4–2

From Clichéd Photo to Personal Expression

For many years, the New York skyline with the Brooklyn Bridge and the World

Trade Center was the clichéd photo of New York City (figure 4–3). To some cultures, the clichéd skyline photograph may not just symbolize New York or the United States, it may also symbolize Western capitalism. This photo is a repetition of an endlessly photographed cliché and, therefore, shows no personal contribution, in spite of its sharpness and appealing gray tones.



Figure 4–3

However, New York's frequently reproduced skyline can be shown very differently (figure 4–4): A group of women practicing yoga in Midtown Manhattan, a non-typical combination that has not already been shown repeatedly. The legs of the four women project to the upper part of the image, as do the skyscrapers. The photographer composed the image so the women would not block each other when they were stretching their legs and arms toward the sky. In addition, the low perspective guarantees that the women's legs would be higher than all the skyscrapers except for the Empire State Building. New York's second-highest building is an extremely important element of the composition because it provides the vertical symmetrical axis. If you cover it, you will notice that the image loses it center. The clouds, roughly triangularly arranged, give the photo its mood.

The photo was taken with a 28 mm wide-angle lens that fuses foreground and background. The clouds get their drama from a medium-red filter that was used carefully so the shadows did not become too dark. The same photo could have been converted digitally using either the red or orange Photoshop filter preset to produce a very similar looking result.



Figure 4–4

Many images, apart from the universally known skyline, are just waiting to be discovered in New York. The numerous steel bridges are ideal subjects for photographic abstracts (figure 4–5). The tiny speck in the photo is a person, embedded in this abstract shape of steel triangles. Photography can create a fusion of elements that differ greatly, for example, the fusion between the person and the bridge's steel structure. You can almost feel the frailty of the human in contrast to the power of the heavy steel supports. A feeling of heaviness pervades the image due to the dark areas that fill the upper part of the photo. The photo might express that the person loses importance in modern architecture, that the person is just a template or a small cogwheel in a Kafkaesque gear. However, you might interpret the photograph differently. Pictorial language is free and, therefore, open to many interpretations.

The photo was taken with a 28 mm telephoto lens that fuses foreground and background.



Figure 4–5

Negative feelings such as fear and anxiety can also be expressed through photography (figure 4–6). The photographer left the spotlessly clean neighborhoods of New York to find the shadow of a fire escape on a rather morbid wall of a house. The diagonal shadow of the fire escape matches the diagonal shapes of the poster with the clear imprint of “fears,” which is a picture within a picture. Trash cans on the curb and a person carrying a shopping bag suggest normalcy. The image’s atmosphere is menacing because only the lower third of the image is bright, whereas the upper part is dark and dominant. Additionally, the structure of the house wall is reminiscent of a bunker rather than a normal apartment house. It is more common for the upper part of images

to be bright; therefore the inverse brightness appears menacing in an image. The atmosphere that permeates the image is more prominent than the actual place where the photo was taken. The photo was taken with an analog camera and a standard lens.

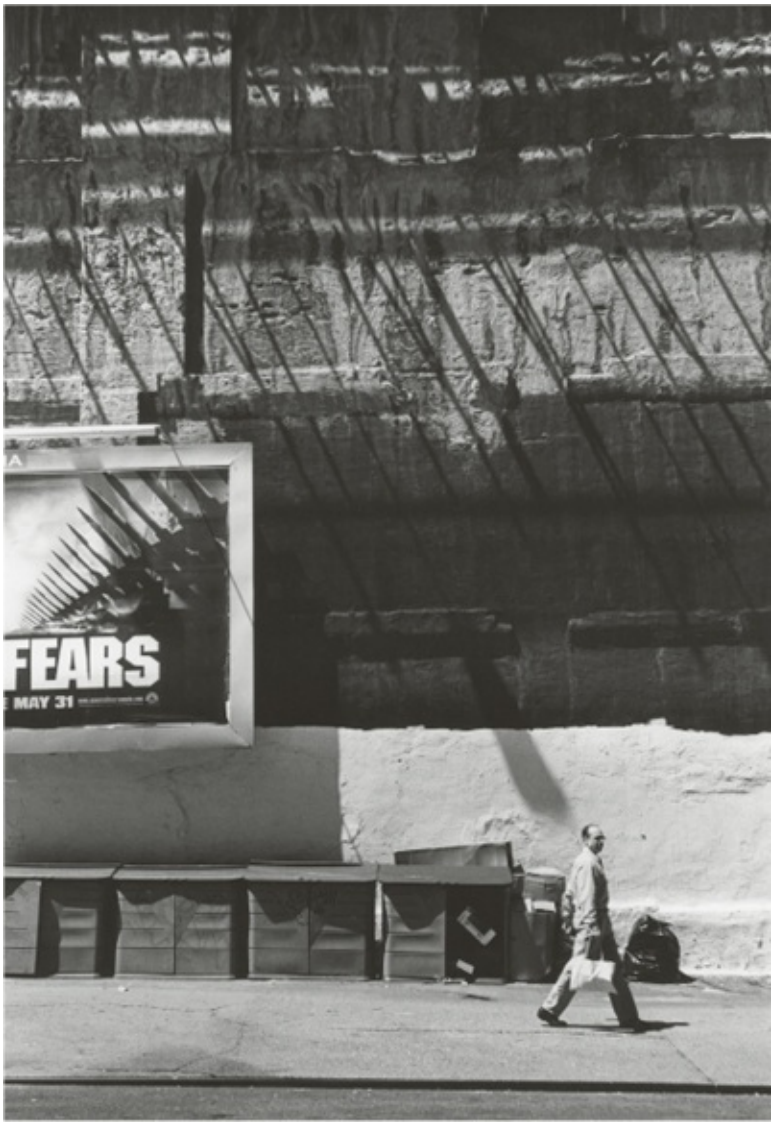


Figure 4–6

A menacing atmosphere can be created in other ways. This scene in the New York subway (figure 4–7) shows a woman placed in such a way that she seems to be in total distress: A wide-angle lens makes her appear small, and she sits in the lower-left corner and is confronted by a man whose cropped back occupies about one-third of the image; this perspective makes him look threateningly large from below. From a pictorial perspective, the woman has no escape. To her

left is a railing; to her right is the large back of the man whose face is hidden from view. The neon lights emphasize the circles under her eyes and she looks pensively, almost fearfully, toward the man. Even if this scene were totally harmless in reality, the pictorial drama gives the impression that the man is threatening the woman. The advertisements behind the woman, on the other hand, give the image an ironic twist as two elegantly dressed young women snuggle close to each other. This portrayal of youth might also distress the woman in another way because (as opposed to the models) she's no longer the youngest. In the upper-left corner, another ad shows a bearded young man with unkempt hair wearing a scarf with the American flag and carrying a large watch in his right hand and flashing a peace sign with his left. These ads contrast with the apparently charged atmosphere between the sitting woman and the standing man.

The photo was taken with an analog Nikon F4 using Fuji Neopan 400 film pushed to 800 ASA.



Figure 4–7

5 Why Are Moods So Important?

Just as in music, emotions can be expressed in photography. How is it possible to capture emotions using an image sensor and to generate tones and gray tones that equal the major or minor keys of the music scale?

There are many expensive cameras on the market that can give us the highest technical pictorial quality, but even these outstanding cameras cannot create atmospheric photos; only the person behind the camera can do that. The photographer can compose a perception of the world in a tight image. Well, what makes a tight image? First, it is the pictorial content, but it is how you place that content in the image that determines the impact it will have. The three photos taken at a beach in Lanzarote (figures 5–1, 5–2, and 5–3) show how different the same content can look.

As in music, images are perceived mostly at the sentimental level. Music conveys emotions that can move us to different states. This is hardly any different in photography. Images show us realistic content, but these are wrapped in emotions, as in music. And, these emotions are communicated to the viewer in the same way in which a concert attendee hears the emotional tones of a musical composition. Photographs that lack mood may cause indifference to the viewer. However, emotionally charged photographs have the power to evoke certain emotional states when they have captured a mood in all its intensity. Emotional expression is achieved only when the flow of enthusiasm becomes part of the act of photography. Without enthusiasm and a profound, internal participation, it is almost impossible to create an emotionally charged photo.

External landscapes with their various moods can reflect internal landscapes —also called “landscapes of the soul”—and their intensive expression is the art of successful, subjective photography.

Three Photos, One Place

The three photos on this page show exactly the same view and yet they convey three entirely different moods:

In the first photo (figure 5–1), the sun lights the rock face while the sky remains very dark. The very same rock face is almost black in the middle photo

(figure 5–2), and the sky is full of rather bright, sheeplike clouds. In the lower photo (figure 5–3), a long streak of clouds snuggles up to the rock face, which—covered in light and shadow—appears to have a checkered pattern.



Figure 5–1



Figure 5–2



Figure 5–3

All the photos were taken from the same spot and yet they are very different from one another.

As is shown here, a mood is characterized not only by the object, but by the weather and lighting conditions. Light is the miracle that is the basis of every photograph. Light is a mystery that illuminates objects and can make them appear radically different, as is the case in these three photos. The beautiful beach seen in the foreground, on Lanzarote in the Canary Islands, provides a good, basic mood in all three photos, which can be compared to a musical theme that is played in a major key.

The photos were taken digitally with a 17–40 mm wide-angle zoom lens with a Canon EOS 5D, and they were later converted using the Black & White conversion tool's yellow filter preset.

Mood in a Minor Key

If the mood evoked by the three photos of the shining beach is analogous to a musical composition played in a major key, then you can compare the photo in figure 5–4 to a musical piece played in a minor key. Here, a mysterious path bordered by cypress tress disappears into the fog. Fog is generally well suited for reinforcing mystical, mysterious pictorial moods. All pictorial means have been applied to pull the viewer toward the vanishing point. It's not only the central perspective that leads the viewer to the vanishing point; the direction of the light does as well. Yet the latter unfolds its magic only after the sky was overexposed by a factor of five in an analog lab (burned gradually toward the top); thus, the vanishing point became the brightest point. The subject also gives the image its mystic mood. In classical times, cypresses were often painted

because they pointed to the heavens beyond: The well-known painting *The Island of the Dead* by Arnold Böcklin is an example. Cypress trees are often planted in cemeteries because of this symbolism.

The photo was taken with an analog camera using a 24 mm lens.



Figure 5–4

Distanced Coolness

In addition to a cheerful, melancholic, or mystical mood, it is possible to express a cold, calm, or even menacing mood. Although the architecture of the new

Potsdam Square in Berlin has an interesting design, it gives a cold impression. The person in the photo in figure 5–5 is mirrored in the truest sense of the word, maybe even symbolically. Is he being swallowed by this modern architecture? Is the architecture reducing him to a template, to become meaningless? These are questions that this photo evokes. Even such a cold impression is expressive. Regarding the composition, two radically different architectural elements dominate the photo and the two clouds connect them.



Figure 5–5

This photo suggests a jump to the depths (figure 5–6). Giant inflatables were fastened to the rooftops of various Frankfurt skyscrapers for Church Day in 2001. Can such a cold presentation trigger suicidal thoughts? Not really, but it

certainly does not evoke a cozy feeling. The backlit cloud intensifies the menacing mood. However, subsequent image processing gave the photograph the dark tone so important to the mood it conveys. The effects of exact filtering of tones (in this case yellow), successful darkroom work, and skillful image manipulation in Photoshop cannot be emphasized enough. The landscape photos of Ansel Adams would not have had their intensity had they been developed in any run-of-the-mill lab. Pictorial tones, whether digital or analog, must be worked out with utmost precision if they are to be compared to musical tones. Pictorial tones evoke moods that allow photos to express their power!



Figure 5–6

6 Street Photography

Good photography does not always have to capture special moments; it can also devote itself to the seemingly trivial and commonplace.

Photographing people on the street is a challenge. How do you skillfully integrate strangers into a pictorial composition and still manage to maintain discretion?

So-called street photography has a long tradition. As early as the late nineteenth century, photographers started turning their attention from the ivory towers of static, staged, and idealized artistic photography to life on the streets. This direction often mirrored social reform. The camera served as an objective analytical instrument for documenting the dark side of early industrial modernism with its dramatic upheavals. The social fabric of large cities, in particular, underwent dramatic changes. Lewis W. Hine, for example, documented child labor in the United States as early as 1907, and his work was instrumental in the adoption of laws that outlawed the practice. Hine's image of a young boy selling newspapers on the street became famous.

However, the high point of street photography started in the 1920s, bolstered by the introduction of the Leica camera. Photographers let themselves be carried away by the flux of the metropolis with its paradoxical, ambiguous universe, and they photographed freely from the hand. Aesthetics changed: What was accidental, casual, surprising, fleeting, and also trivial in urban events became the subjects of these photographers. The camera served as an extension of their subjective view. The metropolitan stroller with the camera was born: The fleetingness of seemingly trivial moments of social phenomena became important to photograph, and of less interest were specific events. The line between street photography and social documentary photography became blurred, as can be seen in the photos taken for the Farm Security Administration (FSA) Project by Edward Weston and Dorothea Lange, for example. Though often impressive, social documentation emerged from it—especially when seen retrospectively—and street photography also snatched moments from the flow of events and identified the photographer as creator of his own reality. Everything seemed to be worth photographing. Henri Cartier-Bresson's decisive moments are still spectacular today, and his photographs reveal moments of very special importance. In the 1960s and 1970s Gary Wino-grand and Lee Friedlander

completely devoted themselves to the banality of everyday life, be it a dog that sits on a deserted street that has remarkably boring architecture or a man wearing a hat walking by a McDonald's restaurant (something Edward Hopper could have painted). Street photography, despite all the apparent triviality of its subjects, is no less than an encyclopedia of the times.

The seemingly meaningless (yet meaningful) simplicity of everyday life can be captured in a photograph. How do you approach street scenes and give importance to the seemingly meaningless in a photograph?

A Foot before Setting It Down

The photo in figure 6–1 shows a banal scene: A man with an ice cream cone in his hand walking by nondescript skyscrapers. And yet, there is a certain magical feeling to the scene. This magic is due to several factors: The backlight gives the image its mood. The bridge over the Seine with its pillar creates an interesting graphic structure; the lamp is an anachronism that lends a bit of nostalgia; and the person is just putting his foot down, while his leg's shadow shows below. This banal moment has been captured and enhanced to become something special through the proper use of light, composition, and design.

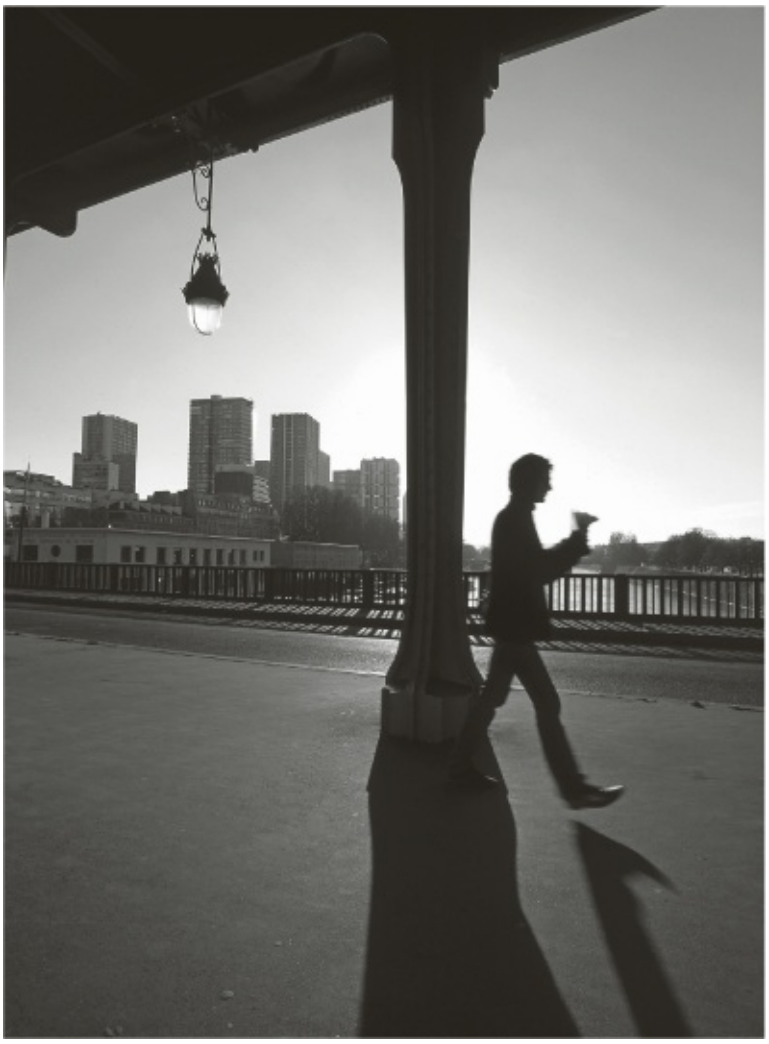


Figure 6–1

If you see a person walking from faraway, as is the case here, and you know in which direction they are headed, it is best not to set the camera in position. People often change their course and walk behind the photographer because they want to be courteous and not block the photographer’s view. To prevent their change of course, aim the camera in another direction at first and then change it to the desired position at the very last moment. However, it certainly helps to plan the composition beforehand. In this photo, the pillar divides the image into the vertical golden ratio. Pictorial tension has been created between the man walking out of the picture at right and the left part with its skyscrapers and street lamp.

Jumping Child

The moment captured in the photo in figure 6–2 also seems banal. The photo is about nothing more than a child starting to run down a flight of steps in Rome. And yet the image goes beyond this common life moment. The viewer sees the scene as if the child will jump into unknown depths because the camera hides the steps and shows only the projecting part and a leap into the street. The child's silhouette fills the image and the photographer has captured the moment of jumping. The child's right leg is swinging forward, and the child's raised right arm stresses the dynamism of movement; a leap into unknown depths is perfectly suggested here.

How is such a street photo created? The photographer invests enough time planning it, of course. The photographer had to carefully set the composition in advance. The 105 mm telephoto lens takes care of a tight perspective. Because a short exposure time (1/500 sec) had to be chosen, there was hardly any depth of field, and the plane of focus naturally had to be set on the detailed background. With these settings, the subject would then be slightly unfocused to the viewer. The photographer had to wait about 10 minutes and make sure to shoot at just the right millisecond so the jump into the unknown depths could be suggested. The minimal but nevertheless crucial shutter lag intrinsic to the construction of early digital cameras would have made this photo impossible.

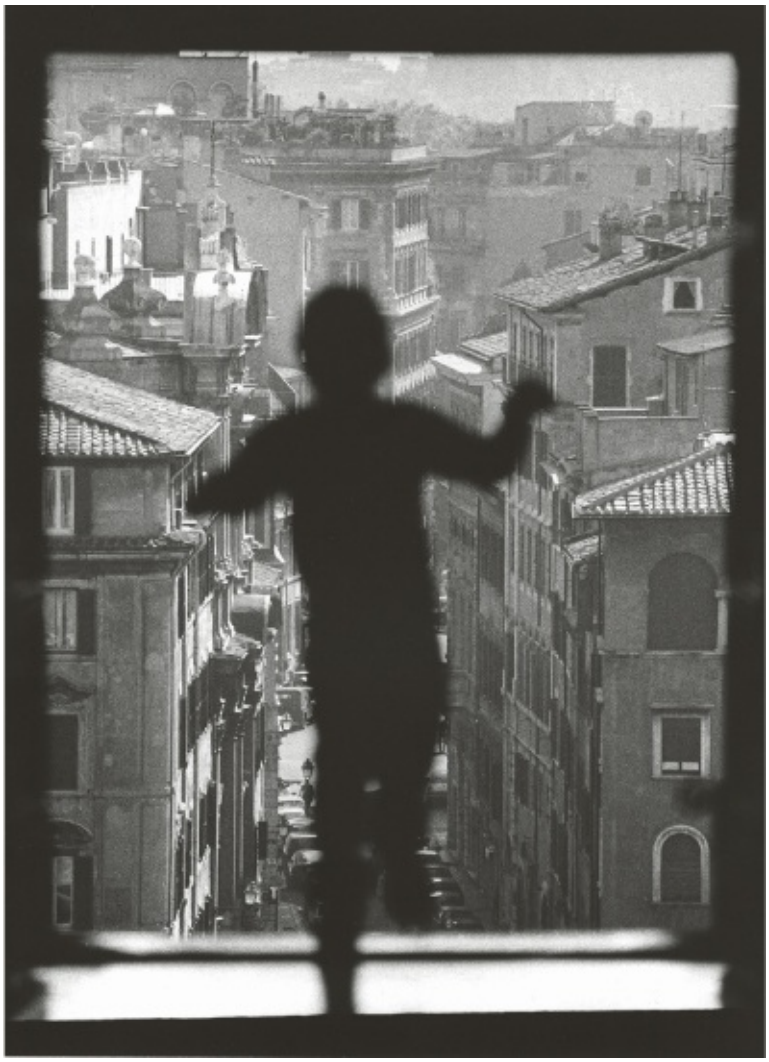


Figure 6–2



Figure 6–3

The People in Front of the Government Building

The scene in figure 6–3 takes place directly in front of the Parliament Building in Berlin's government sector. A man with a braid, who can certainly be described as a typically eccentric Berliner, gesticulates in front of two young men. It is truly street photography to capture such a moment. Backlighting is especially suitable for black and white photography because it can show architecture and people in a highly graphic way. If the government building presented a bombastic, almost sterile impression, the brief human gathering infuses some life into the scene. In fact, man and architecture really do not go together in this photo. Although the three persons have been reduced almost to silhouettes, the impression is that they would normally feel more at home in other premises. This makes us contemplate the quality of modern architecture: Surely such a government building expresses power and coldness; does it overpower people and make them feel like strangers in their surroundings? These three persons, however, assert themselves against the architectural

coldness through their intense discussion. The photo was taken digitally at a focal length of 70 mm.

Mysterious Couple

Although nothing special appears to be happening in the image in figure 6–4, backlighting and the finely textured, fleecy clouds of the sky give it a special atmosphere. A nicely decorated railing also gives it a special, romantic mood. A somewhat strange couple is seen coming down the stairs. Although only the couple's silhouette is seen, you can clearly recognize a rather young man who is taking a considerably older and stooped woman by the hand. Are they mother and son? Or is it a real couple such as the one seen many years ago in the famous movie *Harold and Maude*? There is a certain melancholic element to the image; youth and old age give each other a hand. The image suggests that they are inseparable companions.

The composition is strong because it leads the viewer's eyes through the image from left to right and down the steps with the couple but stops at the man who turns to the stairs, thus keeping the focus in the picture. If you reverse the composition, it loses this effect because you see the couple first and then the stairs; the impression that the couple has just come down the flight of steps is lost (figure 6–5).



Figure 6–4



Figure 6–5

Calvin Klein

The image in figure 6–6 shows a seemingly inconsequential scene in New York, typical of street photography: Two men walk by a bus stop that has a Calvin Klein ad posted. Photography often can relate things to one another even though they have nothing to do with each other or—as is the case here—they are related to each other unknowingly for a fleeting moment. This ability is, however, precisely the magic of photography. It can capture two men so perfectly in an image (as happens here) that you cannot help but associate them with the reclining beauty in the Calvin Klein poster. The men seen here could be part of the advertisement: They are roughly the same age as the woman in the poster and wear suits that could be from the Calvin Klein brand. Their walk is dynamic, whereas the reclining woman lazily looks at the passers-by. The woman poses as a passive person. Naturally, she also exudes eroticism; because she is reclining and looking directly at the viewer, a subliminal invitation is suggested. Both men should feel the invitation of her eyes, but they ignore it and hurry onward.



Figure 6–6

Advertising and reality influence each other: Good advertising recognizes and strengthens the latest trends, or conversely, it sets trends that influence people.

The image is composed of triangles. Both men move toward the bright triangle and the dark triangle is subdivided into two smaller triangles by the metallic column of the bus stop. Although both men are headed out of the picture, the diagonal line of the bright triangle leads the viewer’s eye back into it.

The photo was taken using a 28 mm wide-angle lens.



Figure 6–7

Hitchcock Atmosphere

The photo on the previous page (figure 6–7) is also a banal, everyday scene; once again it is the special atmosphere that makes the picture interesting. The railings of the subway shafts in Paris create the so-called negative diagonal from the upper-left to the lower-right corner. The eye, which “reads” a picture from left to right, is led out of this photo, but the shadows of both persons return the viewer’s attention to the center of the photo. All the figures turn away from each other; even the figure of the lower shadow turns away from the upper figure. The dominant diagonal middle shadow gives the photo a feeling of heaviness, and the concrete adds an eerie, almost sinister quality.

Street photography preserves the moments that occur right next door and on the street; it makes a statement about everyday life and the feeling of being alive.

7 What Does Landscape Photography Mean in the 21st Century?

On hearing the words *landscape photography,* you probably think of Ansel Adams, who is one of the world's most famous photographers. He put his stamp on landscape photography like no other photographer has, traveled throughout the most beautiful places in the United States, and used all the technical means at his disposal to make landscapes appear heroic. Using the zone system, he divided the earth into 10 different black, white, and gray tones—each one aperture apart. In every photo, he used the zones to determine what area of the gray value curve of his negative he should expose. Just as important for creating his pictorial moods were his correct use of filters and his perfect darkroom technique. His photo *Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico* is one of the world's most celebrated photographs. What makes his images exceptional are not only their special atmosphere and their exact tonal values, but also the large format that shows every needle of a fir tree. Ansel Adams took photography of unspoiled nature to the highest reaches.

What innovations can landscape photographers make to surpass Adams? Is it really possible to show unspoiled, idyllic landscapes in our modern world? Surely, the answer depends on what you demand from photography. The serious amateur or semi-professional will make high demands; the representation of unspoiled, idyllic scenes in today's world will probably not be satisfactory. After all, you cannot achieve the quality of Ansel Adams's photographs with a small-format camera, be it analog or digital.

In contemporary photography, there are almost no important photographers who take idyllic scenes. Thomas Florscheutz may be one of the few exceptions, but he does not show landscapes. Instead, he shows extremely abstract yet aesthetically pleasing botanical photographs. Otherwise, unspoiled landscapes are extremely rare or they are abstract in contemporary photography, such as in the following examples:

- Michael Kenna shows landscape moods in his atmospheric black and white photos (in his book *Night Work*, for example) that consist partly of sea, sky, and a minimal foreground of a couple elements. However, the power of the few subjects in his images is unfolded due to special lighting.

- The Japanese photographer Sugimoto has reduced his seascapes even more. Sugimoto's images show only two surfaces: The sky and the sea in black and white are placed exactly in the middle (in defiance of classical composition rules), so viewers see only two areas of equal size with two different, almost monochromatic gray tones.
- Michael Wesely reduces and abstracts his work in another way: This contemporary photographer—whose photos sell briskly worldwide—positions the camera horizontally during exposure, so his photos are reduced to nothing more than washed-out stripes. When the photos are seen from a distance, they resemble the scanner bar codes in supermarkets.

However, another approach started developing in the 1950s: showing breaks. In modern industrialized countries, you can hardly photograph an unspoiled landscape without being exposed to the criticism of showing a "lie" or "making it all prettier." In painting, the realism movement of the last century—as opposed to naturalism—not only represents a pure world, but depicts social conflicts as well. Playwright Bertolt Brecht wrote a great deal about the realism movement, and this movement can in fact be applied to photography. Realism represents the essential character of the environment instead of its superficial appearance. One of the best-known contemporary photographers is Leipzig's Hans Christian Schink. He shows the merciless attacks of the modern world against the landscape (for example, the way newly built highways or railway bridges intrude into the East German landscape). In his large-format photos, you can clearly see how concrete almost violently destroys the fragility and harmony of nature.

Photographer Heinrich Riebesehl of Lower Saxony focuses on images of pure boredom. In his well-known *Agrarian Landscapes* he purposely takes unexciting photos of the boring cultivated fields of his state under gray skies.

One of the few Magnum photographers with an interest in landscape is the Czech Josef Koudelka. His panoramic landscapes, however, reflect no unspoiled world but instead show abandoned tracks of human intervention in a landscape so barren that you could imagine he captured his images in a post-nuclear catastrophe.

It would be a pictorial lie to offer only the images of an unspoiled contemporary world in contemporary photography. To show only unspoiled nature, you should not show the clichéd image of an idyllic world, but abstract the image or create something mystical so the image goes way beyond the idyllic; a couple of examples of this are presented in the following sections.

Unspoiled Landscape with Tuareg

The photograph in figure 7–1 approaches a cliché, yet it may be legitimate because it shows one of the last unspoiled landscapes of this world, the Sahara. Thus, all pictorial means have been used to suggest the openness and wildness of this landscape. The covered Tuareg has turned his back to the viewer and has therefore become a figure we can identify with; his thoughts become ours as both of us take in the seemingly endless panorama of rocks, sand, and sky. This image suggests the full unity and harmony of humanity and nature. And, it is not a lie because the Tuareg are in harmony with their environment in ways that are absent in Western industrial societies. A small break from nature in this photo is the large wristwatch worn by the man. The wristwatch indicates his contact with Western civilization. Naturally, it is legitimate to take such photos in the twenty-first century to record a piece of unspoiled world.



Figure 7–1

Persons and Landscape on Lanzarote

Unfortunately, the relationship of man and nature nowadays resembles the photo in figure 7–2, which was taken in the Timanfaya National Park on Canary Island Lanzarote: A woman wearing white sports clothes and floppy shoes carries a backpack, handbag, and video camera. She looks a bit lost and distracted. A man stands beside her and talks on a cell phone. In the center of this image, you can see a row of camels on which tourists sit somewhat clumsily. The scene takes place before a monotonous volcanic landscape. In this case, humans and landscape appear disconnected and alien to one another. Humans experience nature as part of a short camel ride in the mass convoy, a totally different approach to nature than that of the Tuareg's in the previous photo. Here, nature is presented on a platter, as is the case in America's national parks: Visitors drive by in a car, stop occasionally, look beyond the barricades, and exclaim, "Oh, great!" With that approach, you cannot possibly experience the actual force and wildness of nature because there is no need to work hard in order to come close to it. Humans and nature thus remain strangers, as is the case in this critical "landscape photo" that characterizes the museum-like human approach to nature in today's world.

The photo was taken with a 20 mm wide-angle lens.



Figure 7–2

Abstractions in the Sahara

If the unspoiled beauty of a landscape must be shown, you should avoid the conventional shots. A way out of this trap is to create an abstract composition of the landscape with the camera—make a landscape's abstract structure the subject of the image (figure 7–3). Saharan dunes and their interplay of light and shadow are tailor-made for this. Long focal lengths allow for better abstractions because they show only a cropped image of reality. In this photo, the interplay of two similar curves make it look as if they were painted with an ink brush. Another important pictorial element is the curve of the small dune in the upper-left corner; without it there would be no element of tension in the image.

The photo was taken with a tripod using a 300 mm focal length at aperture 22 to have the necessary depth of field in the sinuous dunes.



Figure 7–3

Creating a Mystical Impression

These two images also go beyond the conventional and move into the realm of mysterious, almost sacred imagery—a topic that is discussed in chapter 15, "Mystical Photography." Clouds can often be used to increase the effectiveness and reduce the clichéd feel of landscape images. The island of La Palma, with

its precipitous landscapes, is the scene of fascinating cloudscapes that often take shape before your very eyes. The photo in figure 7–4 encompasses an extremely broad range of brightness, and I had to take care to ensure that the reflections from the ocean didn't burn out. I used a graduated filter that darkened the upper-right portion of the sky to a degree that allowed me to provide even the sun with good definition. I used the Photoshop Polygonal Lasso to select and brighten various parts of the lower half of the image while darkening the clouds in the right-hand portion of the frame. This meticulous postprocessing allowed me to create the unique mood that the image displays.



Figure 7–4

The second image (figure 7–5) also benefits from its own special lighting mood. It was taken from a boat near Dalyan in Turkey. The sun had already disappeared from view, giving the mountain and its reflection a mysterious, silhouette-like appearance. The waves caused by the boat's movement introduce a dynamic element into the otherwise calm scene. This image too portrays an intact, idyllic landscape, but it's nevertheless dominated by the mood of the lighting, which prevents it from appearing simply soft or insipid.



Figure 7–5

Death of Nature

The low mountain landscape seen in Germany’s Harz region, for example, looks rather conventional in photos (figure 7–6). It is rather difficult to make an interesting photograph of this pretty landscape, which is ideal for hiking and enjoyment. Yet, the German forests are in peril: Only 40 percent of German forests are healthy. The message in this photo is the death of the forest. I used all pictorial means at my disposal to show the death of trees in an impressive way. The twilight atmosphere requires a long exposure that would have been boring without the use of a flash because the entire foreground would have become pitch-black and the trees would have been perceived only as silhouettes. It was therefore important to combine the long exposure with a short flash. The flash could not be used frontally as I did not want to illuminate the trees in the foreground because the mood would have been lost. Therefore, the flash had to be used from the side, behind the first row of trees to give a part of the dead trees a three-dimensional look. Thus, the mood evoked by the light was perfect; the rising half-moon gives the scene its final touch. Differing from a

conventional Harz landscape, the photo now has an allegorical scene that poses questions of how man deals with nature, and its atmosphere points to something mystical. The photo was taken with a 28 mm lens.



Figure 7–6

8 Architectural Photography

The term *architectural photography* is often associated with those somewhat sterile photographs taken on behalf of a client for the simple purpose of showing architecture in the way the architect intended. This kind of photography is still taken nowadays with a professional (large-format) camera. A large-format camera allows the position of the film and optical planes to be adjusted relative to one another in order to correct architectural perspective in all focal lengths. Everything must be perfect in such photos: There should be no distracting elements like big cars to divert attention from the buildings, the light must be succinct, and the sky interesting. Frequently, architectural photos are taken in the "magical hour" (especially for color photography) when exterior light mixes with interior light.

Increasingly, architectural photography was made feasible with medium-format cameras and good shift lenses, but the digital method with a good back, or even a full-format camera with a small-format sensor, has become the norm. Photoshop now offers options for correcting distorted architectural lines.

Looking at artistic photography, there are very few big names that are associated particularly with architecture. One of them is the photographer Reinhart Wolf. He was made famous by his marvelously atmospheric photographs of New York's skyscrapers, taken from all perspectives and in magical light. The enormous structures don't look cold; instead the viewer gets the feeling that the buildings have a soul.

Another of his projects was to photograph industrial buildings in Berlin in such a way that the viewer could almost recognize faces in them. Reinhart Wolf is one of the very few artistic photographers that lovingly presented individual buildings in his photographs. It is typical for professional architectural photography to exclude the personalized, abstract view most of the time; Wolf's inclusion of that view is what has made his photographs so original.

The most famous photographers who specialize in architecture are Bernd and Hilla Becher. They are at the opposite ends of the spectrum from Reinhart Wolf, who tried to intensify his buildings to the mystical plane through magical light. The Bechers, on the other hand, photograph their buildings—whether industrial plants, water towers, or ruins—as neutrally as possible. It is their philosophy to let the object speak for itself, to be as uninfluenced as possible by extreme

lighting or perspective. They work only under gray skies and try to photograph every building from a middle viewpoint. Yet their photos do have a mood. The two founded the Becher School in Düsseldorf, from which three of the world's most successful photographers graduated: Thomas Ruff, Thomas Struth, and Andreas Gursky. Thomas Struth also took some rather impressive black and white architectural photos in Naples, yet it would be wrong to categorize him as an architectural photographer.

Naturally, many other photographers take urban photos. Andreas Feininger's and Berenice Abbott's frequently shown photos of New York are certainly some of the best-known examples.

As in landscape photography, a rather critical approach has become the norm in contemporary architectural photography. I have already mentioned Hans Christian Schink's images of concrete architecture. In his often shown series, *Neon Tigers*, Peter Bialobrzeski shows the faceless architecture of giant new buildings under neon light in Asia's exploding metropolises.

Yet another approach to representing architecture is seen in the works of Harald Mante, who loves to create abstract images from the architecture of southern European countries. For example, he makes the Greek walls, windows, and roof overhangs look like abstract pictures. However, the thought of using architecture as an abstract interplay of shapes is not new. As early as the turn of the twentieth century, the Russian photographer Alexander Rodtschenko turned the world on its head, so to speak. Like Russian constructivism, he used architectural lines abstractly to emphasize the line interplay of oblique lines and shapes; the shape and not the content was clearly the dominant element in his representations. After the Russian Revolution, dynamism became part of the new expression, and this expression of dynamism and faith in progress is reflected in Mante's architectural photos of the ultramodern buildings of the era.

How can you, as a photographer without a large-format camera, approach the subject of architecture in a lively way?



Figure 8–1

Photographing Architecture Digitally

A large facility management company commissioned the digital photograph in figure 8–1 for their office decor. The 21.1 megapixel resolution obtained with the full-format sensor of the Canon EOS 5D Mark II allows the photo to be printed to a width of almost 70 inches without the naked eye perceiving the pixels. Naturally, pixels can be calculated even smaller through Photoshop's image size function (which works rather well) if the size is not exaggerated. Even at this size, sharpness is still amazing and can be compared to the resolution obtained with an analog 4.5 × 6 medium-format camera. The photo was taken with a 17 mm wide-angle lens, which can almost capture (much like a fisheye lens) the entire roundness of the Omega House building complex in Offenbach in one picture. The bare tree has a powerful graphic effect because it is an organic counterweight to the architecture. The trunk is located at the left perpendicular dividing line and subdivides the image. The image was converted to black and white using the Photoshop Black & White adjustment tool and the shadows were slightly brightened with the Shadow/Highlight tool. In such a photograph, a shift lens is not needed because distortion is an intended element

of the design.

Man and Modern Architecture

The photo in figure 8–2 is quite different from the previous one. Here, a shift lens was needed to prevent the Frankfurt Tower and its reflection from appearing to fall over.

To liberate modern architectural photos from appearing sterile, you must apply several photographic principles. What makes this photo so interesting is that it mixes different planes to the point of almost penetrating each other. The various reflections within the architecture of the Frankfurt Fair Grounds create this composition. Particularly important to the composition are the architectural beams, however, because they give the photo its varied abstract structure. Another feature that makes the photo interesting is that the three persons are located on different planes. The people are silhouetted; they are shadowed figures who appear almost overpowered by the modern architectural backdrop, even to the point of looking unimportant. The fair tower is surely one of the prettiest skyscrapers in Frankfurt as it majestically projects into the sky. However, in contrast to such architecture, people appear smaller and seem to lose their importance. The next and subsequent photos prove that good architectural photographs can be taken without using shift lenses.



Figure 8–2

Concentrated Effect with Telephoto Lenses

Both previous photos were taken with wide-angle lenses. These lenses created a powerful architectural effect, but telephoto lenses would create the opposite effect in architectural photography. The next two photos represent architecture's static side. Using a 100 mm telephoto lens generally results in the straight alignment of buildings, which makes it an alternative to the pricey shift lens. Naturally, the degree of distortion in a telephoto lens depends on the angle of the camera in relation to the building. In the photo in figure 8–3, the focal length was 280 mm. With such a long focal length, almost all the lines appear parallel. The picture shows the graphically interesting interlacing of two fire escapes in a modern office building. The composition is a photographic architectural abstraction. The picture was digitally photographed and converted using the Photoshop Black & White adjustment tool. The Shadow/Highlight tool brightened the shadows a little bit.

The composition has a symmetrical axis: Two steel supports run through the vertical center and reflect both spiral staircases. The risk in such a composition is that it can often appear stiff, but this photo overcomes this problem by showing two differently sized spiral staircases. Apart from its axial symmetry, the photo comes alive from its pictorial rhythm: The arched shape of the spiral staircase is repeated five times, thus creating this rhythm. The rectangle in the lower part of the image provides a counterweight to the arched shapes of the staircases.



Figure 8–3

The second photo (figure 8–4) gives the impression that the buildings are very close to one other. The 200 mm lens not only causes this effect, but also does not create any falling lines in the image. This photo shows an interesting graphic interaction of horizontal and vertical lines of two modern buildings in New York with old, ornate houses embedded between them. This photo's abstract composition rests on an exciting graphic web of light and shadow, bright and dark surfaces, perpendicular and horizontal lines, and a few playful organic forms. It shows that architectural photography is not necessarily slick and cold.



Figure 8–4



Figure 8–5

Modern Glass Architecture

Modern architecture is often very clearly and simply structured and comes to life from the transparency of its large-scale glass construction. And yet, how do you photograph a building that does not have any ornate or strong graphic structure (figure 8–5)? A shift lens would be lethal here because the distortions created by an extremely wide-angle lens would create especially interesting effects. However, the building by itself on such a gray day would not have been interesting enough. When I photographed the building, I could not use the interior lighting, so it made sense to me to add a second element: The angle formed by the street sign perfectly imitates the lines of this building in Berlin's downtown scene. The sign symbolically encompasses the building and is a graphic element that also contains a strong black tone, thereby creating the proper countertension to the rather gray building, which helps create an interesting photo in spite of the boring weather conditions. It was also very important to use a gradient filter to gradually darken the upper part of the sky. This compositional aid also adds tension to this photo. The digital photograph was converted to black and white using the Photoshop Black & White adjustment tool. If you don't have a gradient filter, the effect can still be created with Photoshop; however, a photo taken with a real gradient filter generally

looks more natural than when you add a gradual darkening later.



Figure 8–6

Using a Model to Strengthen the Composition

A large project development company that designed the new Western Port Tower in Frankfurt commissioned this photo (figure 8–6). The view from this interesting structure was grandiose, so it made sense to enhance the view using all available compositional aids. A model serves as an identification figure for the viewer, following in the footsteps of German romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich, who often did just that (see, for example, his *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*). A human standing in front of the wide expanse of a landscape or an urban setting invites you to identify with him or her, especially if the figure's back is turned to you or if the figure is reduced to a silhouette. A suitable and strict axial symmetry contributes greatly to the photo's sacred expression. The woman becomes the vertical symmetrical axis, from which the window triangles are perfectly mirrored. The gradient filter used here darkens the sky appropriately and provides a good contrast to the city's architecture that is illuminated by the sun. Frankfurt is a fascinating city for black and white photography because its numerous modern office buildings provide fascinating contrasts and design structures.

This photo was also shot digitally and converted using the Photoshop Black & White tool.

9 The Graphic Element in Black and White Photography

Black and white photography restricts the image to black, white, and gray tones. You can even eliminate gray tones in a black and white image to create a strong composition. Reduction is a very important design element—not just in photography, but in modern art as well. Many painters (such as Piet Mondrian) gradually moved from a complex composition to simple shapes, to the point of almost reducing the picture to a monochromatic surface.

However, black and white photography is about something else: An image without color emphasizes the graphic form. In black and white photography, pictorial content is based on a more or less graphic, abstract image structure. Photojournalism can also strongly convey the content, such as in this basic graphic structure. A fundamental component of black and white photography is the interaction of light and shadow. Looking through the viewfinder, it is essential to abstract and design the interaction between light and shadow. This is easier said than done because it is not always so easy to ignore the influence of color. With good digital cameras, it is possible to take one test photo in black and white mode and view the image on the camera's display. The final picture should be taken in color mode, however, and converted to black and white with an image manipulation program.

The Russian photographer Alexander Rodchenko (mentioned earlier) was one of the first photographers to allow the abstract, graphical structure of an image to dominate its content. In *Girl with a Leica*, one of his most famous photographs, he not only tilts the bench on which the young woman is sitting to make it a diagonal, he also uses a monochromatic play of light and shadow scattered over the entire scene. The photo does not intend to show the girl as an individual; it is all about a fascinating compositional design.

Another outstanding personality, this time of post-war Germany, was Otto Steinert, whose works helped post-war photography reach new heights. Under the concept of "subjective photography," he postulated the photographic medium as the expression of one's own feelings and moods. He was a master of abstract structures, radical crop, contrasty prints, and the representation of sometimes surrealistic moods. His negative prints and solarizations follow the tradition of Man Ray and László Moholy-Nagy. His best-known photo shows a moving,

blurred pedestrian photographed from above with a tree trunk surrounded by a graphically interesting, circular rusty grid. The emotionally charged subjective photography created with the help of all graphic elements had a profound and long influence on post-war photography until the rather down-to-earth Becher School gradually created a sort of movement against it.

One of the early masters of graphic design was the Hungarian photographer André Kertész. Many of his works now rank among the most famous photographs of the last century. His photograph of a fork on the edge of the plate is an example of one of the first very simple, abstracted, minimalist representations of an object and its shadow. Kertész was one of the first photographers who captured the ordinariness of everyday life in a wonderfully graphic way. It's sad that he had to suffer the loss of many of his negatives twice in his life. He was a friend of Brassai's, whom he also impressively portrayed.

Such graphic black and white photography does not play an important role in contemporary art. However, black and white photography characterized by such pictorial compositions is still very much in demand in photojournalism. The war photographer James Nachtwey is an example of how someone can combine good graphic design in the tradition of Cartier-Bresson with the incredible emotional charge of a tragic subject matter. Nachtwey is certainly the best-known war photographer of modern times. A film made about him has helped to make his work known to a wider audience. He works intentionally in black and white, because with color photography there is always the risk of putting an attractive, esthetic veil over things. A moody sunset in orange would surely be counterproductive to depicting the intentions of war.

The grand master Henri Cartier-Bresson also consciously chose to work in black and white. He was unsurpassed when it came to capturing decisive human moments; he incorporated these moments in a complex pictorial event in which the abstract, graphic composition was the perfect fundamental element. This photographer stressed the graphic blending of man with his more or less architectural surroundings.

Light and Shadow as Basis of Compositional Design

In the unspectacular photo in figure 9–1, light and shadow are the real subject matter. The family has been reduced to shadows. The paving of the sidewalk is deteriorating. In the middle of the image, a large piece of concrete has broken loose, and the cracks in the concrete create interesting, organically flowing lines

everywhere in this photo. In addition, the concrete stone blocks create a network of lines that flow uniformly. This network, made up of uniform and organic lines, is an element of tension with respect to the interesting shadows. Here, the design has reduced reality (i.e., people) to their shadows only. The photo was taken in New York and proves that the skyline with the Brooklyn Bridge does not always have to be the only interesting pictorial subject. You can probably take images such as this one right in front of your doorstep; you must only change your way of looking. Instead of setting your sights on reality, look downward to discover the world of shadows. Once you do this, you may capture the exciting moment that will result in a successful composition, which is created by the interesting graphic structure of the shadows.

The photo was taken with a 28 mm lens.



Figure 9–1

axial symmetry: *Axial symmetry refers to the popular definition of symmetry as mirroring in respect to an axis. Axial symmetry primarily differs from other kinds of symmetry by containing objects that mirror each other. Furthermore, the mirroring objects relate to each other across a given axis that is either marked or unmarked.*

The axial symmetric picture consists of two mirroring parts which start out by counterbalancing each other compositionally, thus often creating compositions that are statically in balance. (Description refers to Figure 9–2, see next page.)

Reduction to Verticals and Horizontals

The photo in figure 9–2 of the old Frankfurt stock exchange building is an image that makes do with almost no intermediate tones and therefore has an extremely powerful graphic impact.

The photo was taken digitally with a 200 mm focal length under backlit conditions. Looking at the histogram (figure 9–3), you can see that almost all medium tones are missing. When measuring the exposure, it was essential not to allow any light to burn out and to have some texture in the shadows of the beams. In good digital cameras, it is possible to adjust a mode on the Info key that, when blinking, indicates where the lights have burned out. If burnout has occurred, try to underexpose the photo a bit until nothing important blinks any longer in the display. The image is composed symmetrically around the axis formed by the central vertical girder. Without the addition of human subjects, the image would appear formal or even dull. However, the three silhouettes make the image interesting. The lower pair are obviously involved in a conversation, and the person on the upper floor is busily on the way to somewhere. This abstract depiction of people within a modern architectural structure embodies the true essence of black and white photography.



Figure 9–2

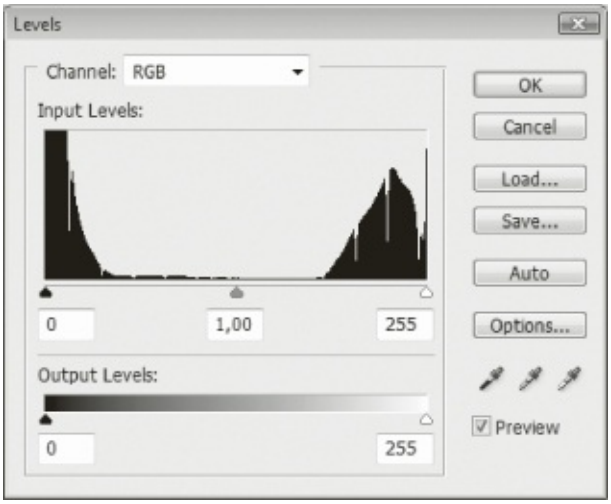


Figure 9–3

The Lively Finishing Touch

In the photo in figure 9–4, it was important to move away from the rather

colorful design of Frankfurt’s Zeil shopping arcade and create an abstract, graphic pattern within the entire architectural variety found in this arcade. To organize the various structures in this photo, it made sense to create a basic symmetry on which the composition could rest. Thus, the escalator becomes the vertical symmetrical axis from which the image to its left and right has a roughly matching symmetry. This symmetry, however, is not rigid but is broken up by sufficient detailed shapes. The photo’s basic graphic structure is thus an interaction of long diagonal lines and short horizontal lines as well as of many smaller rectangles that make up the floor structure. Embedded into this pattern lies the photo’s finishing touch: a girl in the middle of the scene who extends her arms and legs. A second girl follows behind, but she doesn’t stand out as much. The girl in the center of the picture breathes life into the photo because without her, the architecture would have been too rigid.

Needless to say, it was necessary to wait a long time until this scene could be taken with a 20 mm lens.



Figure 9–4

Lounge Chair on the Crosswalk

The photo in figure 9–5 reminds one of a Hitchcock movie. A broken lounge chair lying in the middle of a crosswalk obstructs the view. On the crosswalk you can see nothing more than a discarded water bottle, the shadow of a traffic

light, and a man’s legs and his shadow. Houses around the crosswalk are not included in the photo, and even the end of the crosswalk is hidden from view, as is the actual shape of the man. Perhaps all these unknown elements are what lend a somewhat eerie quality to this photo. The graphic structure also gives its content a marked pictorial rhythm: The gradually narrowing lines of the crosswalk match the rhythm of the lounge chair’s lines that are perpendicular to them. Once again, without the cropped man and his shadow, this scene would have been rather monotonous. Here, a person has been embedded into an abstracted scene characterized by a pictorial rhythm that has graphic impact.



Figure 9–5

Iron Footbridge

LIFE magazine photographer Andreas Feininger repeatedly stressed how important it is to thoroughly examine an object before photographing it. This applies, naturally, only to immobile objects, not to snapshots. The iron footbridge in Frankfurt is such an immobile object, and therefore it made sense to first look carefully at it from all viewpoints in order to find its most photogenic angle. Such a steel bridge is ideal for creating a more or less intense graphic abstraction. Thus, the photo in figure 9–6 gets its esthetics almost exclusively from the shadows on the bridge, especially from the pictorial rhythm seen in the gradually narrowing rosettes of the railing, but also from the intense shadows of the supports. This composition would not have sufficed without the person's legs approaching the viewer. The gradually receding shadows on the bridge create a movement toward the distance, and the approaching person, on the other hand, creates a forward, counteracting movement. This contrast gives the photo its dynamic quality. Once again, there are hardly any middle tones here, making this photo a graphic reduction.



Figure 9–6

Another approach to photographing the same iron footbridge is seen in figure 9–7. This photo's strength comes from the mood infused by the backlight. In spite of the backlight, it is very graphic, as can be read in the histogram (figure 9–8), because the diagram swings only in the black areas and in a rather bright gray area. In the upper part of the photo, the iron footbridge stands out graphically from the background; two persons give the photo some additional life—a standing figure in the upper left and another one reduced to show only legs on the upper right. Three more bridges provide an additional graphic element in the lower part of the photo. In addition, the new Westhafen Tower in Frankfurt rises majestically over the river, which is shimmering in black light.

The photo was taken digitally and proves, as mentioned several times, that a good digital camera can tackle backlight outstandingly as long as you

underexpose the scene a bit and make sure not to burn out any lit areas.

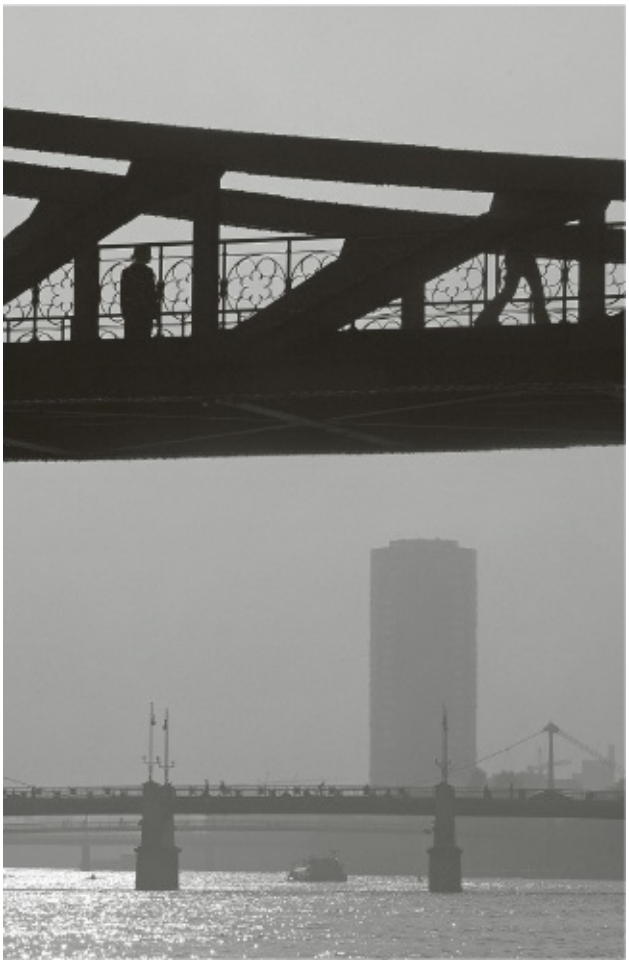


Figure 9–7

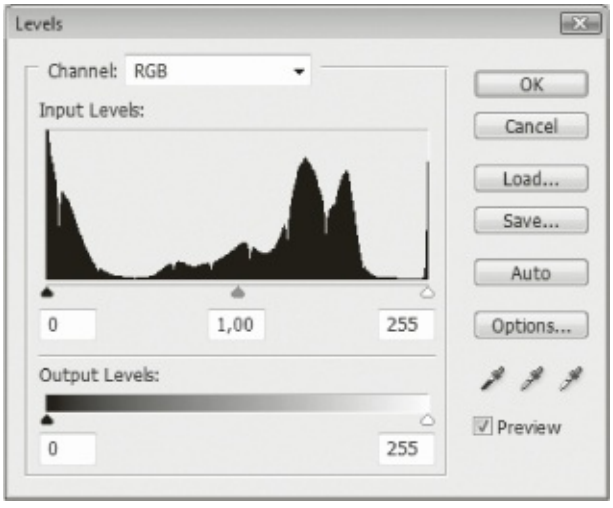


Figure 9–8

10 The Poetry of Melancholy Moods

In our contemporary society, which is characterized by suppression, melancholy is often frowned upon. Yet, what would art or the world of photographic images be without the special poetry of melancholy moods?

Although in today's fun-loving society a melancholic person is seen as a spoilsport, Leonardo da Vinci saw melancholia as a special quality that was an important prerequisite of the artistic personality. However, in former times melancholia was not linked mainly to taking everything seriously; rather, it was defined as an impulse to seek out the depth and true nature of things in a quest to turn away from life's superficialities. If you carefully read about the lives of numerous composers, writers, or visual artists, you will notice that melancholia characterized their lives. How much would the world lack if it didn't have Hermann Hesse's writings, Rainer Maria Rilke's poems, Van Gogh's canvases, Caspar David Friedrich's grand landscapes, Edward Hopper's urban scenes, Ferde Grofé's suites, or Rachmaninov's piano concertos? From this you can discern a fundamental truth: It is the nature of many artists to pour the "unbearable lightness of being" into an art form and to fathom the deep nature of things. Why should photography, as an artistic way of representing the world, not also participate in this expression? And it is especially in photography, as you have seen, that the tendency is to produce pretty, clichéd photos. In reality, viewing a sunset is certainly a fascinating and exhilarating experience, but it's nearly impossible to avoid creating a clichéd photo of a sunset! A photo will only be really successful if, whenever possible, it does not compare badly with reality.

A photograph of a sunset will usually compare very badly with the real thing, but photos of much more banal subjects that are intensified in a composition can sometimes express more than the real subject. How many photographic artists have succeeded to intensify banal subjects by converting them to master photographs? This is a much greater art than just photographing impressive moments such as sunrises or sunsets or grandiose images of landscapes and cities, many of which have become clichéd photos. With this in mind, a plea for including melancholic moments in photographs should be understood.

With that said, it is one of the biggest mistakes to follow the rule to leave the camera at home when it is raining or the skies are gray because the changing

weather conditions can also tell stories. However, many photographers fail when attempting to shoot in the rain, which is almost impossible to capture with the camera. Only backlighting is capable of making rain clearly visible on film or sensor. In the cinema or on television, rain is usually lit with strong backlights. If you want to capture rainy conditions in photographs, try including damp windowpanes in your images. Or you can photograph at night, as Robert Hausser did in his impressive photo in which his slightly long exposure showed the rain, illuminated by a street lamp, falling on a bench and on the asphalt.

Melancholy can be expressed through changing weather conditions as well as abandoned places or objects (most of the works by Robert Hausser can attest to that). The feeling of melancholy can also be vividly reflected in the human countenance and tell the story of a person's life. A master of melancholic poetry is the photographer Josef Sudek. He has infused all his subjects, whether landscapes, cities at night, abandoned gardens, or still lifes, with a hint of melancholy that does not depress the viewer but instead stops and grants him a moment of contemplation.

Italian Rain

Referring to rain, Mario Hene once sang, "It's as if every drop tells a story." His hymn to rain continues, ". . . the window panes slowly become blind . . ." Friedensreich Hundertwasser loved the rain too, and even named his houseboat Rainy Day. If you are able to feel it, rain has its own very special intrinsic poetry.

This magic is, of course, especially tangible in a room with a wonderful view in a small Ligurian village. The rainy mood in the image in figure 10–1 invites you, in your imagination, to get comfortable behind the protective window pane and enjoy the view of the ancient town on the opposite hillside.

In the lower-left third of the image, the notebook screen is fully integrated into the overall picture. The image has a classical composition that is built around certain basic elements. The horizontal slat in the window frame is aligned with the lower horizontal "golden ratio" line and the distant town lies near the upper one. The right-hand edge of the open notebook also lies close to the right-hand vertical line.

The photo was shot at f20 using a Canon 70–200 mm lens set to 93 mm. Focus was set on the village, and the raindrops are distinct but slightly blurred. I deliberately increased contrast by a large margin during conversion to black and

white.



Figure 10–1

The Moment as Metaphor

The feelings of melancholy and sorrow are so deeply expressed in the facial expression and posture of the Indian woman in figure 10–2 that the photograph almost becomes a metaphor for these basic feelings. The light, however, does not convey a depressing mood, but instead it becomes somewhat transfigured. The sunlit cloth that she uses to cover her head gives her an almost Madonnalike appearance. An oval is the basic shape in the photo because it guides the eye around the composition. It is the nature of photography to freeze a fraction of an instant, and that's why it is even more important to capture something on film or sensor that will unfold its effects over long periods and not lose its magic after it's looked at for just a short time. A photograph endures when it reveals something so universally valid that the message of its image goes beyond documenting a specific moment. The photo was taken with an analog camera using a 105 mm telephoto lens.

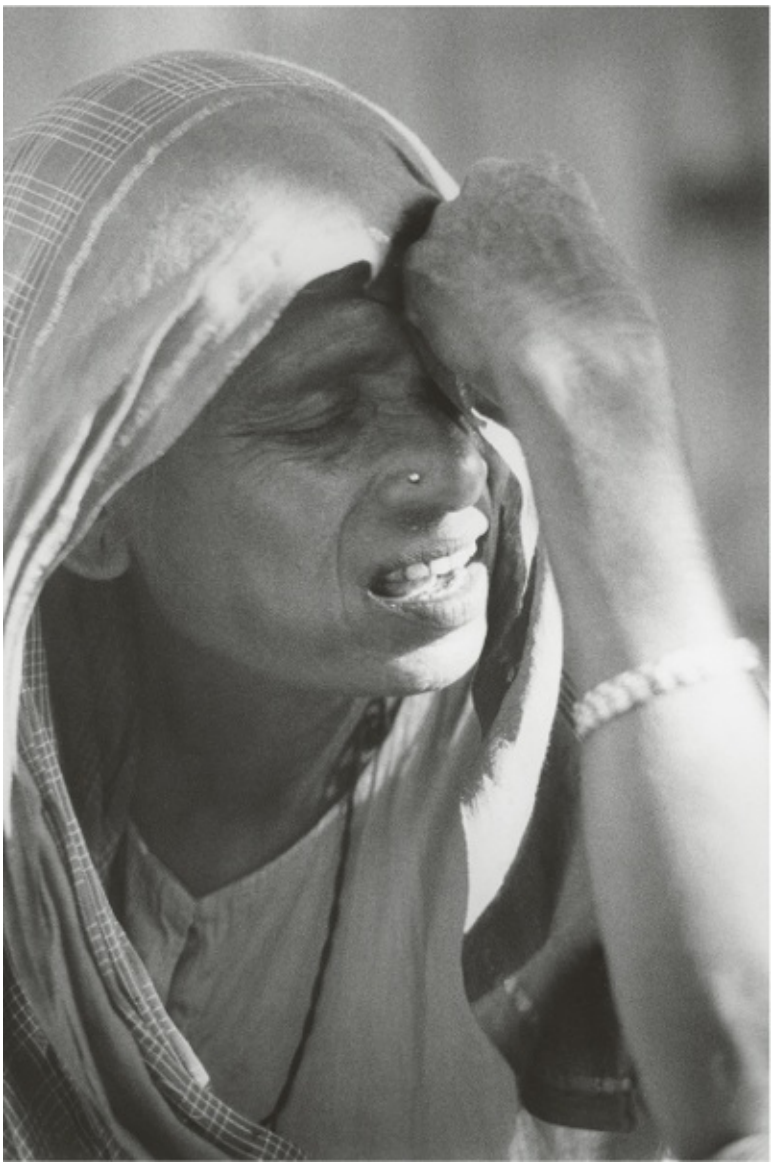


Figure 10–2

Youth by the Fence

The young man in figure 10–3 looks so intensively at New York's Ground Zero that he has not noticed the photographer taking his photo, even in such close quarters. The young man's facial expression reveals that he is feeling highly emotional when looking through the fence. The viewer recognizes this highly charged moment, a view to a past destroyed by disaster. However, what also makes the photo memorable is the shadow of the fence on the youth's face and

torso. This shadow creates an interesting graphic element that is important for a black and white photo; the photographer was brave enough to quickly move the camera to get the shot. The odds of capturing a successful shot were quite low. If the youth had been asked to look once again through the bars, he would certainly not have been as emotional. Why not take the risk? The worst-case scenario would have been for the subject to look away. Naturally, it is essential to assess the “victim” of this kind of snapshot because you may get a rather unfriendly reaction. Photographing a stranger from such a short distance (with the 50 mm lens) is, after all, an intrusion upon his privacy, but this intrusion is justified when the image represents the subject in a dignified way.



Figure 10–3



Figure 10–4

Madonna in the Parking Lot

In reality, the area shown in figure 10–4 is usually full of automobiles, campers, and tourists because the Madonna is located in an Irish pass nearby, and there is an outstanding view in both directions. Generally, the Madonna, which is fenced in by an attractive wall of natural stone, cannot be appreciated because of the numerous cars and human activity. However, when fog blocks the view, the atmosphere makes the Madonna and wall stand out. Only a No Parking sign indicates the hustle and bustle normally experienced in this place. Fog makes the world appear mysterious because it settles on things like a veil, thus forcing the viewer to play a game of hide and seek. The viewer wonders, “What can still be discovered behind this gray foggy wall?” The mysterious side of melancholy moods is expressed here.

The photo was taken digitally with a 29 mm focal length of a 17–40 mm Canon-L zoom lens.



Figure 10–5

Fog in Turkey

Fog settles like a delicate veil on the tall evergreen trees of the Katschkar Mountains in eastern Turkey (figure 10–5). Without the fog, such a forest landscape would have looked rather commonplace, but the fog adds an extra something to the image—a breath of fairy tale melancholy. It appears as if elves and fauns could live here, just as Arnold Boecklin often painted them in his landscape canvases. Fog creates a delicate interplay of the most varied shades of gray that were enhanced in the darkroom through careful dodging and burning in.

The photograph was taken with an analog Nikon F4 and a 200 mm telephoto lens and enlarged on grade 4 paper. The relatively large grain of Kodak's Tri-X Pan is actually perceived as pleasant in such a foggy picture. However, you can obtain the same impression of film grain digitally.



Figure 10–6

Rainy Beach

A beach generally means sun, blue sky, sand, and an easy life, but in the next photo we see a leaden sky viewed through raindrops. Yet, the sky and raindrops are exactly the poetry in the image in figure 10–6. Thus, this image of a rainy beach in Lanzarote is a lot more interesting and moody than an image of a beach photographed for the hundredth time under intense sunlight, or even a sunset over the sea.

The photo was taken digitally with a 35 mm focal length and a Canon EOS 5D; sharpness was adjusted to the background. In spite of an aperture of f22, the raindrops in the foreground are not in focus, and this is exactly what makes this photo interesting. Even with professional zoom lenses, it is difficult to work with depth of field because they generally do not have depth of field control. The photo was converted to black and white using the Photoshop yellow filter preset. Contrast was increased by about 20 percent during the process.

These examples will hopefully motivate you to find inspiration in gloomy and melancholy moods that may lead to poetic images. After all, these

sentimental tones belong to the varied range of existence.

11 Abstracts

Photography took the place of eighteenth and ninteenth century naturalistic painting. Starting with impressionism, painting went in its own direction and has increasingly liberated itself from a natural way of viewing the world. The exception was the realistic movement that emerged from naturalism. In painting, the realistic movement had the task not only to depict reality, but also to represent deeper traits of reality.

Photography had taken over the representation of nature, but photography also had to liberate itself from the restricted representation of reality. Thus, the movement to take photography out of the convention of realistic representation began at the turn of the century with the Russian photographer Aleksander Rodchenko and in the 1920s with Hungarian photographer László Moholy-Nagy and his famous Photograms.

It may seem that an endless variety of abstraction methods have been used in photography. However, what does abstraction really mean? According to the dictionary abstraction is “detachment from material things.” Thus, abstract thoughts start detaching themselves from objects and developing their own inner life, and exactly the same holds true for pictures. If painting makes reality into an abstract and presents a new creation of shapes and colors, then the fact is that photography is always the portrayal of an objective world. And yet for photography, the concept of abstraction also means a detachment from the world of objects. When, for example, the abstract structure of a picture becomes the meaning, photography has detached itself from the actual object. Although pictorial meaning is based on an abstract structure, as frequently stressed in the example images throughout this book, most viewers are accustomed to noticing only the pictorial meaning. Only when the subliminal pictorial structure is seen abstractly (i. e., detached from the object) and found to be interesting will the pictorial meaning become powerful. In order to test the abstract structure of a very objective photo, it’s a good idea to turn the image upside down because then it will to lose its connection to reality and its abstract basic structure will become visible to the eye. This structure is the basic pattern that pervades the image, the interplay of lines and shapes of all kinds. A master of abstract design was the painter Vassily Kandinsky. He developed an entire philosophy about how the most varied shapes could be placed next to one another to create tension. He saw this as an act of creation.

In photography, the art of good design is to work out a composition for the subjective interplay of forms that is the basis for all objects and to frame the objects with the viewfinder in such a way that an exciting abstract pictorial structure is created. In summary, meaning can become dominant over form, meaning and form can be balanced, or the abstract shape can eclipse meaning. A detailed view can sometimes tell a bigger story than a complete view can.

However, it is risky to photograph structures because one can quickly fall into rigid formal images that have lost their meaning. The photos taken in amateur photo clubs are full of these kinds of structural pictures. Although they are certainly good for practicing composition, because they train you to abstract reality, they are purely formal pictures. The pictures should be about meaning that has become so abstracted that through the photograph you come close to the nature of the respective object.

On the other hand, the abstraction may be so successful that you can see a well-known object in a new way. For example, the Dadaists declared their collages (old, ripped-off advertisements and the like) to be art and placed them in museums. They detached these old, tattered advertisement scraps from a conventional concept to see them in a new light and rediscover their tactile appeal and sensory nature.

Kurt Schwitters was a Dadaist artistic leader, and in photography, the surrealist László Moholy-Nagy was one of the masters of abstract structures. His photograms of faces were abstract, but also deeply spiritual. In his best-known portrait, he placed his own cheek on the photographic paper. The photo resembles the image of a planet in the night sky.

Just as one cell in our body contains the fingerprint of the entire body, a detail should provide information about the entire structure from which it originated and not be a formal end in and of itself.



Figure 11–1

Traces of Time

Those things in which time has etched its traces can be especially interesting. Although things like disintegrating walls or rusted-out gates often become casualties of renovation, there are still exceptions, as is the case here in Brunswick (figure 11–1). It is a mystery how time changes everything that we humans attempt to straighten out and order into a uniform monotony, converting it back to the original organic state. This image almost lets you feel the texture of the wall. It is important for a structure not to become the object itself but rather to describe a mysterious content.

The photo was taken with the normal focal length of an analog Nikon F4. Getting involved in taking shots like this invites strange looks from passers-by. Most people tend to think that the sights that everyone photographs are the ones worth looking at, and is it crucial to free yourself from this type of clichéd thinking when you are out shooting. After all, the letters on this wall tell a story about the riddle and passing of time.

Light and Shadow

The photo in figure 11–2 is characterized by a diagonal pattern of shadow lines that create a strong contrast. It shows the right side of a rusty door whose hinge can still be seen at the top. The dividing line between the door and its surrounding wall lies exactly on the vertical harmonic dividing line. The image is brought to life by the structure's tactile appeal, emphasized by the sunlight falling obliquely on the surface, causing even the small uneven areas of the door to cast shadows. This delicate structure is overlapped by the rough structure of the two large shadows, the four small shadows, and the shadow in the upper-right corner. These long shadows lend the photo its power and tension. The door is in Jerusalem's Old City, and the effect of time is noticeable here as well. You should not forget that when looking at such an image, you can detach yourself from the concept itself. In other words, if you associate the photo just with the concept of "old rusty door" and reduce it to this concept when looking at it, you devalue the picture. Images are much more than the linguistic concepts that attempt to explain them. The more you detach yourself from such concepts, the more you will allow an image such as this one to exert its influence through its varied textural appeal, and the more you will be able to enjoy it.



Figure 11–2

Formalism with and without Content

The small photo (figure 11–3) depicting the mirrored structures of the two towers of the Deutsche Bank in Frankfurt demonstrates what I mean by pure formalism. The interplay of the graphic lines is unquestionably interesting, and a longer telephoto lens would have possibly made it even more interesting. Yet there is something missing in an image that has been reduced to a pure graphic design, as shown clearly by the larger photo (figure 11–4). In this photo, form is no longer the content. Both towers represent the pictorial content, but now we see a figure with open arms reflected in the façade as if ready to jump off the roof of a tower. The photo has now acquired a totally different meaning that makes the observer wonder: Is it a symbol of a crucified person in AD 2001?

Does such cold skyscraper architecture invite one to commit suicide? Certainly not; architecture has its imposing side after all. And yet such a photo moves the viewer to reflection, as opposed to the previous photo. Here, the symmetrical composition of the structure is only the fabric from which the content has been woven: The left side appears multilayered due to the reflection, whereas the right side is almost monochromatic.

This photo was taken with an analog camera, a 200 mm telephoto lens, and a tripod (so I could stop down and shoot with a slower shutter speed).

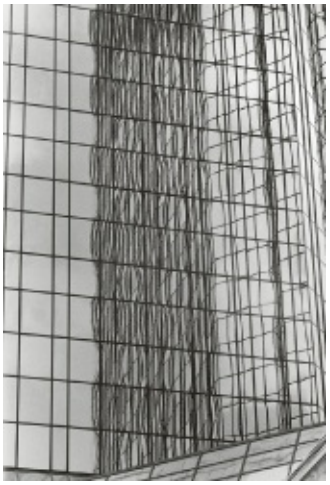


Figure 11–3



Figure 11–4

Structures as Fantasy Stimulators

We dealt with clichéd photos earlier in this book. The structure of a tree bark (figure 11–5) is by no means a clichéd photo, but a detailed photo such as this one is so common that it has lost its appeal. Among other things, the art of abstract photographs consists of discovering something that is really unique and has not often been seen. This is more so the case with the larger photo (figure 11–6). This image shows the fibers at the end of a palm leaf, although you could be forgiven for thinking that it is a diagram demonstrating mathematical set theory. Simple, minimal shapes are often the most powerful.

When shooting macro subjects such as this, photographers nearly always have to battle with a lack of sufficient depth of field. You can increase the available depth of field by using a small aperture, although a small aperture would have given the background in this photo too much emphasis, thus distracting the viewer from the more important circular shapes in the foreground. The photo was shot digitally using a 50 mm macro lens and converted to black and white using Photoshop. Contrast was significantly increased.



Figure 11–5

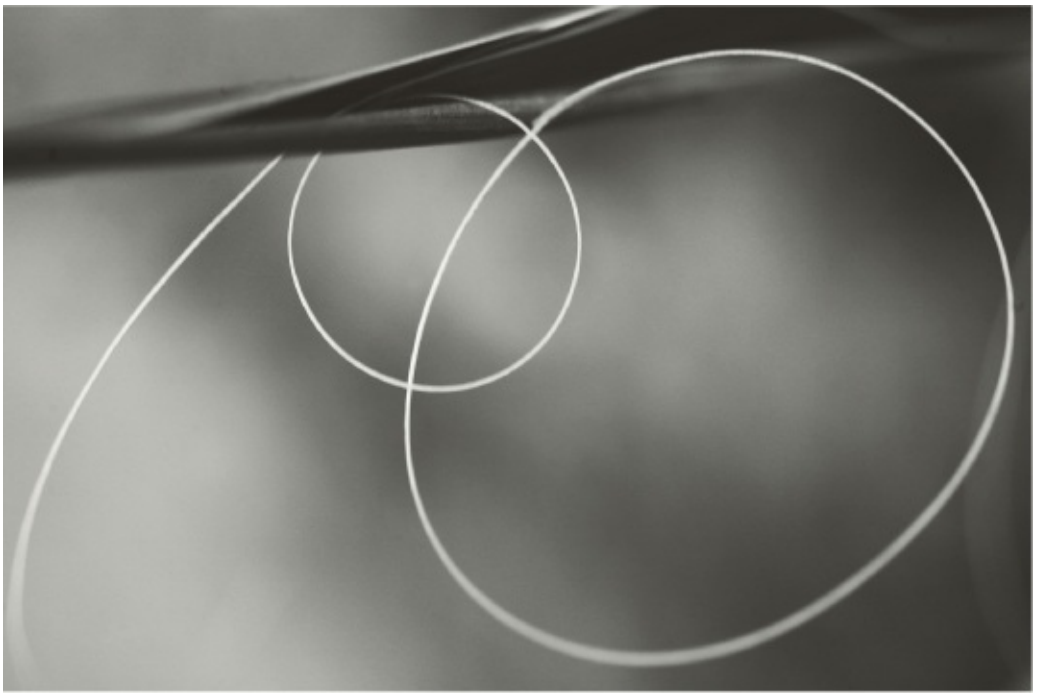


Figure 11–6

12 Surreal Photography

Surrealism was an all-encompassing movement that expressed itself mostly in the visual arts starting in the 1920s. One of the founders of surrealism, André Breton, was strongly influenced by the revolutionary ideas of Sigmund Freud and thought a lot about mental associations. Freud was interested in discovering the repressions and suppressions of the human soul that were dormant and remained unrecognized in the inner self yet determined existence. The surrealists sublimated all the instinctive urges of the subconscious because they believed in the "omnipotence of the dream" (Breton) and started to express themselves creatively. Because the subconscious also expresses itself very strongly in images (dreams, for example), it goes without saying that surrealism found its strongest mode of expression in pictures as well. Dalí, Magritte, Delvaux, and Max Ernst are universally known, yet Man Ray or Moholy-Nagy expressed themselves so strongly in their photographs that surreal thoughts determined their work.

In pictorial language, the nature of surrealism is to put together things on the canvas or print that would never be manifested in everyday reality.

Such varied things are easily united in painting. Dalí invented the most varied subjects that had very little to do with reality (think of his melting clocks as an allusion to the riddle of time). Magritte, on the other hand, remained closer to reality, painting the surreal in a more subtle way. In one canvas, for example, he united night and day, and in another painted a man who looks at a mirror but sees himself from the back. Magritte also believed that the concepts we have of objects should not be equated with the objects themselves.

However, what does surrealism mean for photography? In photography, it isn't so easy to put together a surreal world because, after all, you are always oriented toward reality unless you create a collage with multiple exposures, or a photomontage (with the help of Photoshop, for example). If you do not want to do it that way, the art of surrealistic photography lies in tapping into reality to discover surreal moments, moods, and objects that possibly don't belong to one another yet nevertheless can reflect the dream images of the soul. "Everyone walks toward the image carried within," said the French photographer Edouard Boubat, as already mentioned in the beginning of this book. Every person has these inner images, which manifest themselves in the daytime and especially at

night in our dreams; they are expressions of the inexhaustible source of a subconscious creativity. The art of the photographer consists of searching for and finding those places that correspond to his or her inner images.

To approach the source of the subconscious, it is especially important for a photographer to rely on intuition and invest a lot of time in this quest, in a manner similar to the way Robert Hausser expressed it (see pages 32 and 76). In this way, the photographer will find the shots that serve as counterparts to his own inner images and in doing so can express the subconscious.

Surreal photos can give the subtle impression of not belonging to this world, as if they have been dreamed, as if they led the viewer beyond the realm of known perception. Even in photographs with a touch of surrealism, objects that have nothing to do with each other in the real, logical world come together in the image and start relating to one another. Yet it is precisely because of this odd relationship that an image can lead to the depths of the subconscious. This result is perhaps comparable to Buddhist koans or mantras that seemingly make no sense, and only after you meditate on them for a long time will they lead your soul to venture to a deeper level. This level can be called metaphysical, but to what extent photography can reach this level (in the sense of Herbert List's fotografia metaphysica) will be the subject of a special examination in chapter 15.

Following are some suitable examples of photographs that can lead to a "surreal" level of the subconscious.

Yoga

Canary Island Lanzarote is, in many ways, surrealistic because a large part of the island looks as if a volcano has just erupted. The photo in figure 12–1 gives evidence of the inhospitable world of this island that has been sliced through by a brand-new highway.

The white stripes on the asphalt contrast with the harsh, uncomfortable, and also unreal surroundings. The final touch in this photo is the small, ornate, hand-painted sign that reads "Yoga." It fits with neither the new asphalt nor the surrounding volcanic rock and, therefore, gives the photo an even more surrealistic touch. The Yoga sign indicates a homelike world, an antithesis to the dark, merciless surroundings. However, it is above all extremely surprising because nobody would think that a comfortable place where yoga could be practiced could really exist in this environment. Black is the dominate color on

this extraordinary island, as is also the case in this photo. It was important to bring out the white highway stripes in the darkroom and to increase their contrast as well. In addition, the sky had to be burned in so a “white hole” would not appear on top and the clouds could stand out dramatically from an almost black sky.



Figure 12–1

The photo was taken with an analog camera using a 20 mm wide-angle lens.

Cemetery Tombs with Volcano

The next photo (figure 12–2) was taken in the Canary Islands. “What are these dark, strange, and mysterious rectangles?” asks the viewer. They lend the image, together with the volcano protruding above them, a surreal effect. These are the tombs of a cemetery in which the dead were placed long ago, as was custom in more southerly latitudes. The photo, therefore, does not only refer to the layers of the subconscious, from which countless ideas about death have originated, but it also points to the spheres lying on the other side. We are reminded of the paintings of Italian artist Giorgio di Chirico, whose favorite subjects were the Italian totalitarian architecture premises infused with surreal effects.



Figure 12–2

This photo doesn’t drift toward something idyllic; a telegraph line runs obliquely through the sky and creates a division. Compositionally speaking, the photo has a latent folding symmetry in which the Teide Volcano in Tenerife, the island opposite La Gomera, creates the central focal point. A layer of clouds over the mountain crosses the image, moving from bottom left to upper right at about the same angle as the descending telegraph line. The intersection of the clouds and the wire lies exactly above the volcano’s summit, thereby mirroring its shape once again. The folding symmetry can be recognized in the perpendicular imaginary axis of symmetry, which runs exactly through the middle of the volcano and the middle of the crossing.

Such subtle elements give photographs a clear pictorial order and, with it, more power.

You should implement subtlety when presenting images with a surreal effect in photography because photographs always depend on the “actual reality,” unless you create an image with Photoshop, in which case the appeal of authenticity that is so essential in photography is lost.

Gate to Another World

The photo in figure 12–3 depicts two worlds that seem to clash against each other, and they are so close that the effect is surreal. Here we see the sacral world bump mercilessly into the secularized, realistic, and pragmatic world of the twentieth century. Yet in these circumstances, the gate to another world remains open. Two persons stand, so to speak, at the threshold of both worlds and hesitate to walk across the gate. Hamburg’s Nikolai church ruin stands

amidst the modern architecture of the 1960s and ’70s that took no notice whatsoever of the distinguished surroundings of the huge ruin. Thus, this photo has a somewhat unreal effect, reminiscent of Orson Welles’s film *The Trial*, which was based on Kafka’s disturbing novel. Only in the story, it was the door of a giant office building that would open, and it led to an equally gigantic sacral space. With this, Kafka insinuated the interconnection of capital and church.

In this photo, however, it is important to note that the viewer is within the sacral space and looks out to the uncomfortable architecture from a homelike perspective. Both persons seem to come toward the viewer, but in the end they don’t dare to enter this space.

The photo was taken with a 24 mm wide-angle lens.

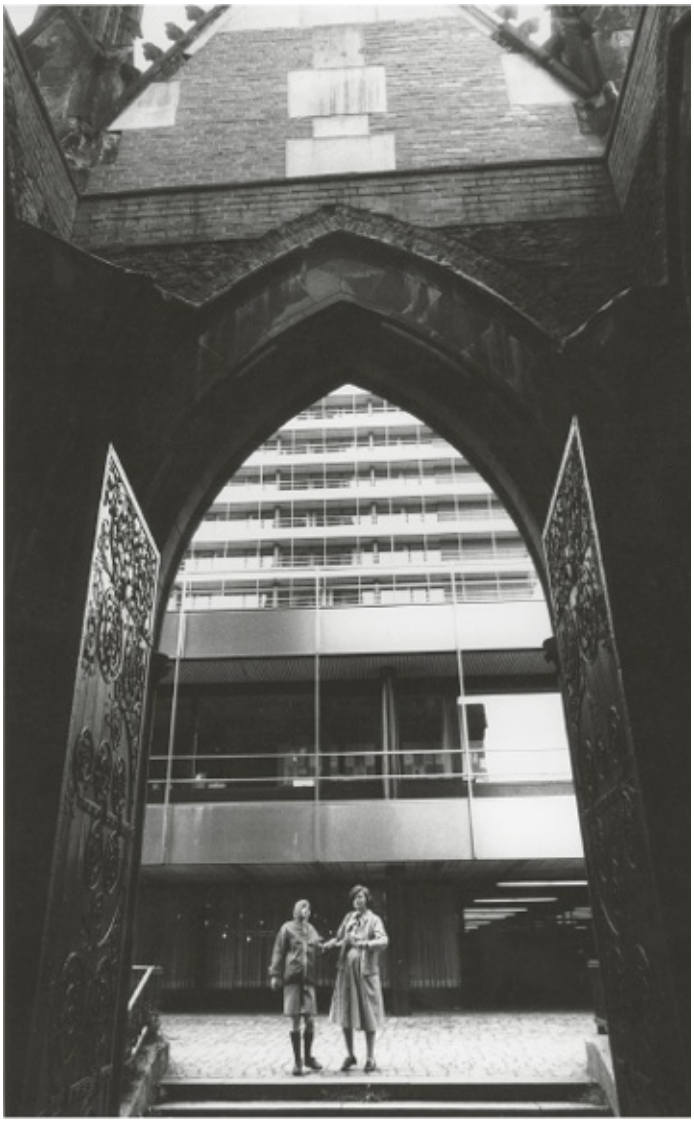


Figure 12–3



Figure 12–4

Train Station Without Tracks

The photo in figure 12–4 has a totally surreal effect: A sizable train station with two platforms, but without tracks, and yet a passenger who seems to be waiting for a train. It is a scene that apparently makes no sense at all. Reason must be put to work in this image; you want to solve the puzzle but the image does not provide an explanation, and this is precisely what makes the photo so surreal. Still, I owe the viewer an explanation: The photo shows the Jerxheim train station located on the former border with East Germany near Helmstedt. At one time, the main Hanover to Magdeburg railway line passed through here, but after the border that separated East and West Germany was built, the main line was moved. The tracks were taken out, and only a secondary line between Wolfenbüttel and the village of Jerxheim remained. This small one-platform track is on the other side of the platform on the right, so the passenger is really waiting for a small suburban train. Since then, the two platforms seen here have been demolished and replaced by a small, new platform for the train providing service to Wolfenbüttel. The Jerxheim train station seen at left in the

background is now a private building. The photo also gives the impression of an isolated, abandoned place.



Figure 12–5

The photo was taken with an analog camera using a 28 mm wide-angle lens.

Absurd Concrete Surface

Th scene in figure 12–5 also has an unrealistic and absurd effect: black and white masonry on a giant tarred surface that leads into the distance. In the background, this gigantic concrete slab is bordered by a couple of power pylons, some small volcanoes, and several palm trees to the right. The image, which is devoid of any humans, elicits questions: What is the purpose of the concrete surface in the foreground that contains only black rocks? What is the giant slab used for in this deserted place? Here, free associations can be given free rein: Does the area have anything to do with the military? Is it a former landing strip or is it used in the large celebrations of the Mancha Blanca village of Lanzarote? This place does have a special meaning because in the 1930s an island volcano erupted and its lava flows almost obliterated the town. The villagers then built the patron saint a special chapel situated behind the photo.

The picture was taken with an analog camera using the 35 mm lens of the

middle-format Mamiya 645 (which corresponds to a 21 mm wide-angle lens in a small-format camera). Afterwards, the negative was scanned. A gradient filter was necessary when shooting the picture so the lowlying clouds of the marvelous, backlit sky would contrast enough, but the light areas would still have definition.

View in the Distance

The photo in figure 12–6 looks surrealistic because it incorporates three viewpoints: The view toward the bottom to a skyscraper below, the view toward the front, and the view toward the top into the sky. It is a photo of an American skyscraper taken with a triple exposure. The three viewpoints are so enmeshed in one another that they remind the viewer of the inner images often seen in our dreams or imagination: One image appears to be replaced by the following one in a matter of milliseconds. The person stands before the window, raises the arm to the forehead, and either looks down or is immersed in thought. The levels of reality mutually penetrate each other. The image provides plenty of opportunities for subconscious associations: flying, jumping to the depths, levitating, infinity, and much more. It stimulates thoughts of a fantasy.

Technically speaking, in a triple exposure you must be careful to underexpose each exposure by one to two stops because three exposures must be accommodated in the gradation curve of a single negative. In principle, the multiple exposure technique is controversial in artistic photography, so I use only one example of it. The important factor is to have a pretty good idea where the different elements will be placed in the picture and what effect the composition will have when the elements penetrate each other. With digital cameras, which allow multiple exposures (e.g., bracketing), this is naturally easier because you can see the composition immediately displayed on your camera’s liquid crystal display (LCD) screen.



Figure 12–6

New Towers of Babel

The building on the futuristic-looking construction site in figure 12–7 has recently been finished and is now the tallest skyscraper in the world. It is located in the middle of the newly built center of Dubai. The mood of the sky makes this image appear more surreal than a “normal” photo of a construction site. The dense clouds and the way the sky becomes darker toward the top of the frame produce an almost threatening atmosphere. More enormous concrete foundations are being constructed in the foreground, and the Burj Dubai Tower at the left edge of the frame is so tall that even the super-wide-angle lens used here was not able to capture its entire height. However, this crop emphasizes the sheer size of the building by leaving it to the viewer’s imagination to complete the picture.

It is very tempting to compare this scene with the biblical story of the Tower of Babel and Pieter Bruegel’s famous painting. Mankind often attempts to surpass its own achievements, but whether this tendency is a blessing or a curse

remains to be seen. However you choose to see things, the mood of the sky in this photo is really quite apocalyptic.

Care was required to ensure that the highlights in this image didn’t burn out. Because I used a graduated filter, I had to dodge the upper part of the tower during postprocessing to keep the tones in the building consistent.

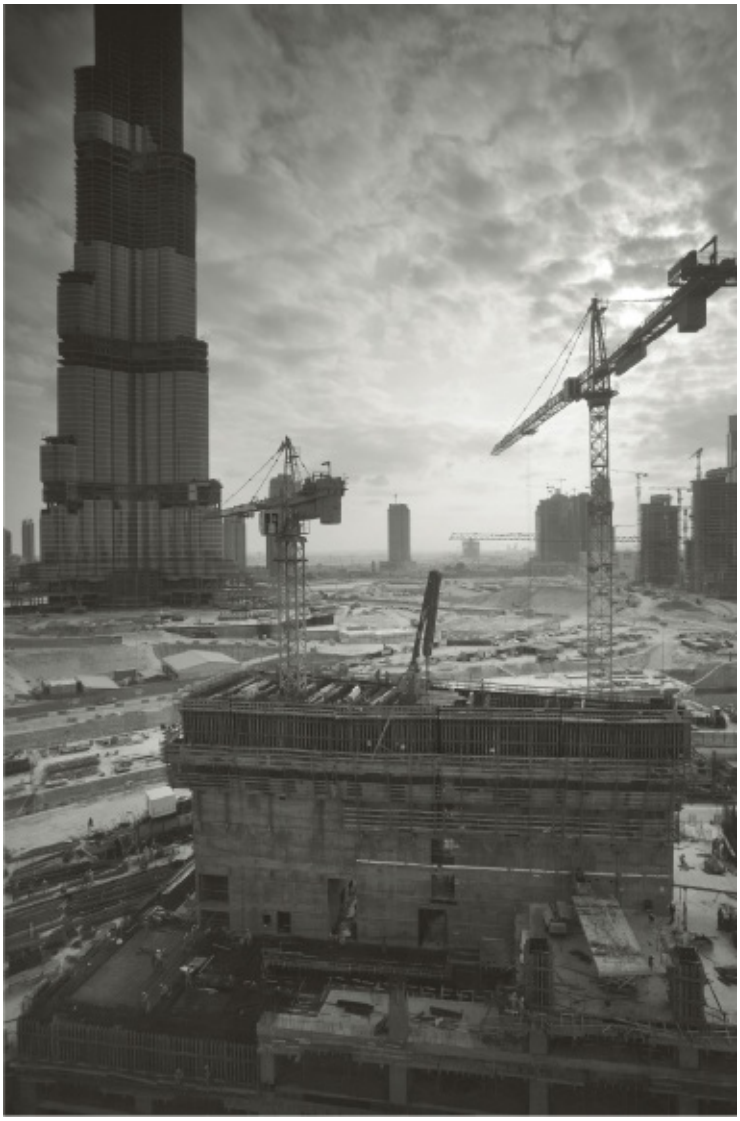


Figure 12–7

13 Portraits

It is the widely held belief that a good portrait is generally a well-lit depiction of smiling, young, and dynamic faces. However, that is often superficial because the artistic depiction of a person should be more than just good compositional lighting: Every person has an individual personality and spiritual beliefs and a close relationship to his or her surroundings, which undoubtedly leave their mark. A sophisticated photograph of a person should attempt to show their individual traits (including wrinkles and spots) as well as factors from their surroundings that have influenced them. Such portrait photography can be achieved from both maintaining a certain distance and from having an intimate knowledge of the person. Obviously, it is easier to take photos of friends or acquaintances than of strangers, and it is also very tempting to mount the telephoto lens on the camera and shoot voyeuristic portraits.

Usually, a better alternative would be to photograph strangers by approaching and getting to know them. If you decide on this method, it's a good idea to engage in a conversation before making a portrait, and you should also attempt to ask unconventional, personal questions to get to know the person a little better. When doing this, it should not be a problem to have a brief relationship with the person and to move beyond conventional conversational topics. The individual being portrayed will remember such a conversation very well, and the photographer, in turn, will get a deeper understanding of this person, which is the prerequisite for a good portrait. After such a conversation, you can bring out the camera. Ideally, it would be best if someone else would remain in the room to continue the conversation so you can concentrate on taking the photo.

There are many vivid examples of good and artistic portraits in the history of photography, but there are bad ones as well. Photography began with portraits of the bourgeoisie, and the aim was to hide, rather than show, the sitter's real personality. In the mid nineteenth century, emulsions in photographic plates were not very light sensitive, photographers had to expose for a long time, and sitters had to remain still by leaning on columns or other objects. This resulted in numerous mediocre portraits that were taken in a partially aristocratic ambience. Disdéri was such a portrait photographer; he produced visiting cards (cartes de visite) that were not much more than souvenirs. But even for a celebrity such as Nadar, clothing was almost more important than personality because it was

regarded as a second skin that sometimes said more about the person.

The innovation of faster emulsions soon liberated photographers from this kind of photography. Naturally, photographers such as Eugène Atget and Bill Brandt could now go outside, and with this development came the demand to depict people in a more realistic way. Edward Steichen, Paul Strand, and Alfred Stieglitz are good examples. “I am American. Photography is my passion. The Search for Truth is my obsession,” said Alfred Stieglitz about himself in 1921. His portraits a long with those of Paul Strand, fulfill this demand.

On hearing the word *portrait*, one invariably thinks of Richard Avedon’s innovative portraits of the 1970s. His minimalist portraits taken before a neutral background framed by the black film border have become famous everywhere. The harsh, pitiless lighting characterizes his photographs, with no glossing over of any kind. They are deep personality studies obsessively photographed with love. Avedon himself has given this opinion about his photos: “Youth never moves me. I seldom see anything very beautiful in a young face. I do, though—in the downward curve of Maugham’s lips, in Isak Dinesen’s hands. So much has been written there, there is so much to be read, if one could only read. I feel most of the people in my book, *Observations,* are earthly saints. Because they are obsessed, obsessed with work of one sort or another.” Because he was obsessed as well, he is therefore undoubtedly the most distinctive antithesis to the highly-traded portraits of the Becher School follower Thomas Ruff, who has consciously covered up any indication of an individual character in his portraits.

Indian Tribesman

This photo (figure 13–1) was taken at a distance from the person (in other words, with a telephoto lens). It is the result of a long stay in a remote Indian village, so it’s no quickly shot voyeuristic image. It shows an older man of the Todas tribe in southern India. The viewer should notice that the interplay of light and shadow in the man’s clothing and turban causes the photo to come to life. If an employed portrait studio photographer would have used such lighting, however, he would probably be fired, but in this kind of more sophisticated photography, you must free yourself from such conventions. It is precisely the contrasty interplay of light and shadow that emphasizes the expressive force of the person’s face. Naturally, it is essential not to allow the eyes and mouth to get lost in the shadows but to make sure they are clearly recognizable by printing the image on grade 2 (soft) paper. The fact that this person has lived all his life in a different world from ours is clearly shown here. His head and body

covering, as well as his expression, show us that he has retained the customs of his remote village near Ooty in southern India where he has lived all his life. Certainly, time seems to go by very differently here, and the profound roots that this person has to his region, tribe, and family are much different than the somewhat looser affinity to life typical of the Western world. This tribesman, photographed with an analog camera and a 105 mm lens, personifies prehistory.

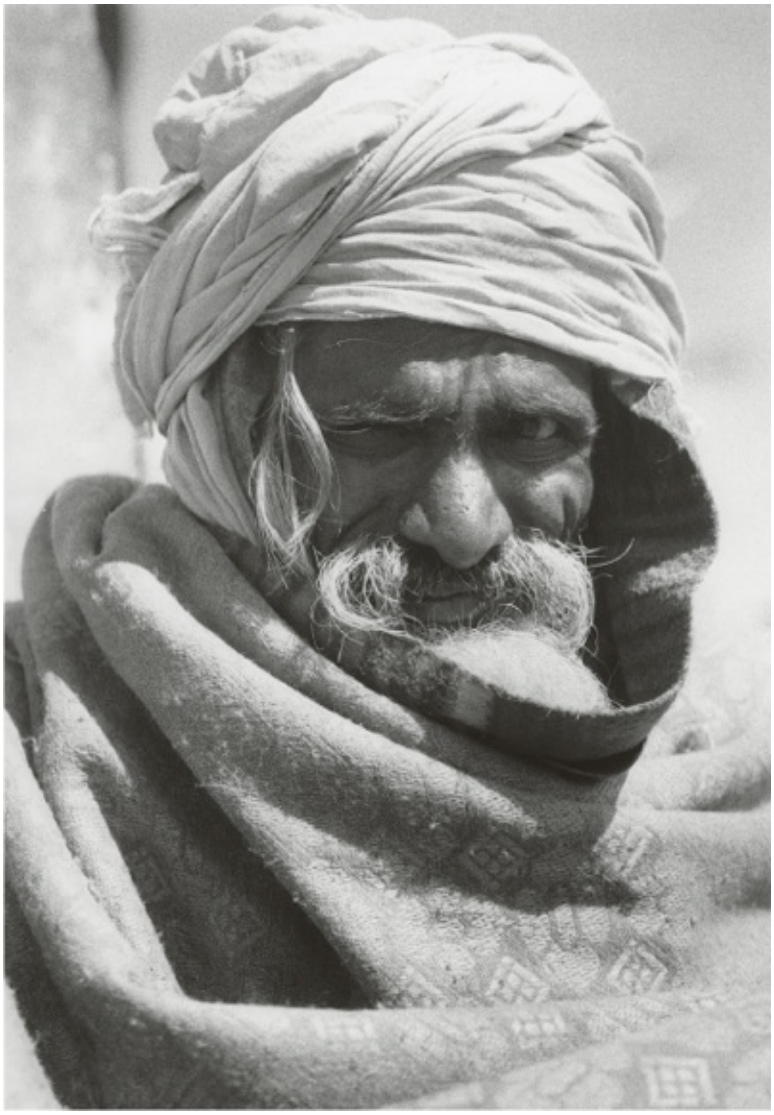


Figure 13–1

The Other Side of the Coin

Contrary to the previous photo, which expresses pride, security, and roots to the

past, the image in figure 13–2 shows the aimlessness and loneliness of humans.

The shadows of unemployment, poverty, and neglect are nowadays an integral part of many Western societies, and for these reasons social critique photography has a great deal of legitimacy. This homeless man in New York City willingly allowed me to photograph him in his favorite spot. It was ironic, even almost cynical, that on this very day a row of posters titled “The Elegant Universe” were hanging behind him, thus opening up a whole range of interpretations for this image. The row of posters to the left suggests that they go on forever. The fact that the man was willing to allow me to photograph him indicates that he had not yet given up and had kept his dignity. Taking such a photograph is certainly a tightrope walk because on the one hand it is very important not to degrade the person with the camera and on the other hand a good portrait must also be able to tell, or at least hint at, the story of someone’s life.

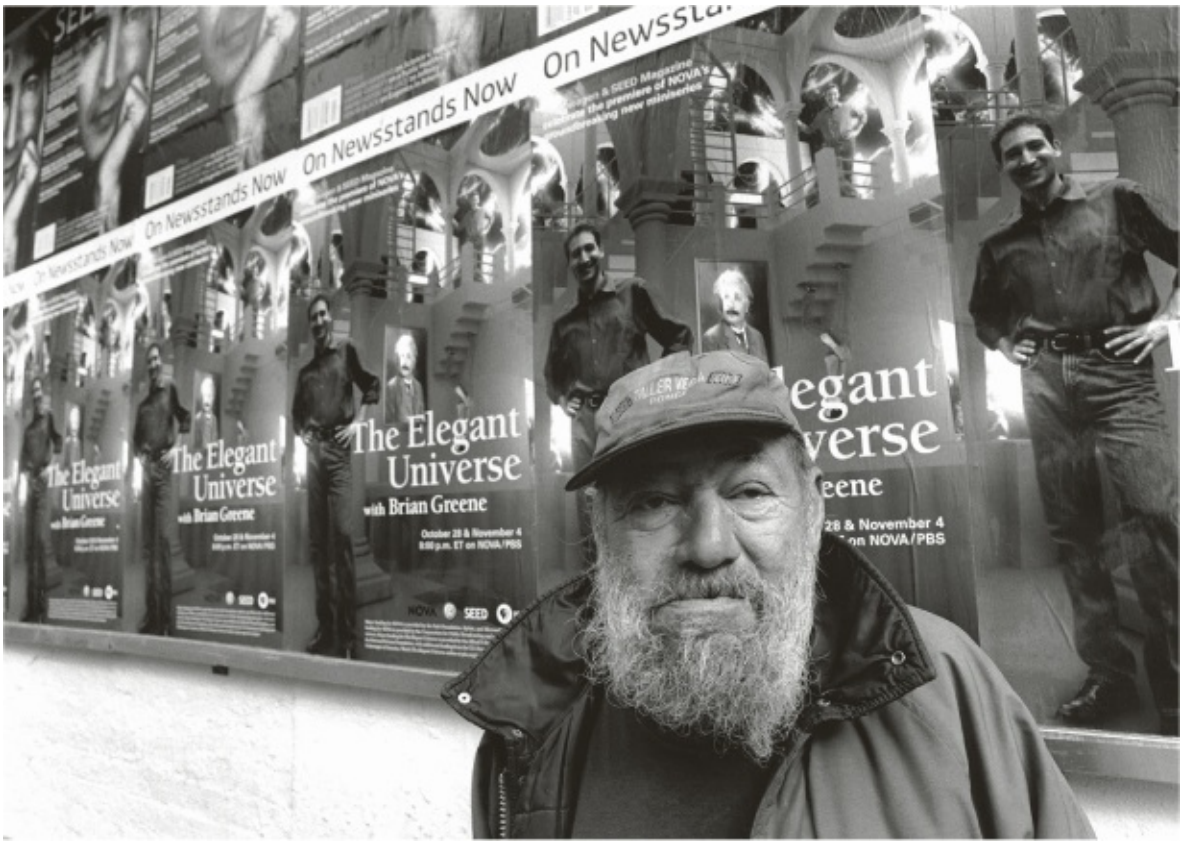


Figure 13–2

The photo was taken with an analog Mamiya 645 and a 35 mm wide-angle lens.

The Beauty of Old Age

According to the classical ideal of beauty, young and smooth faces are always preferred, and a portrait studio will likely use soft lenses to eliminate any hint of wrinkles. And yet, isn't the facial landscape of the elderly perhaps more interesting than a young face? Figure 13–3 depicts a life that has stretched over 90 years and experienced, among other things, two world wars, all of which have left traces. In this image I set out to capture the multilayered character of this woman and to catch the instant that does justice to her personality. Part of the task was to emphasize and not to conceal wrinkles and uneven spots: For example, the axis of the mouth does not run parallel to the axis of both eyebrows. A conventional portrait studio would have photographed the lady from the left side to compensate for this unevenness. A photograph taken from the lower right, however, emphasizes these nonparallel axes and therefore accentuates her character.

Her expression and the slightly raised left eyebrow in the photo betray a skeptical, maybe somewhat fearful attitude, and yet the entire face expresses integrity and dignity.

The photo was taken with an analog camera using a 50 mm lens with Kodak Tri-X Pan pushed to 800 ASA. The natural interior light was sufficient to shoot with f/4 at 1/60 s.

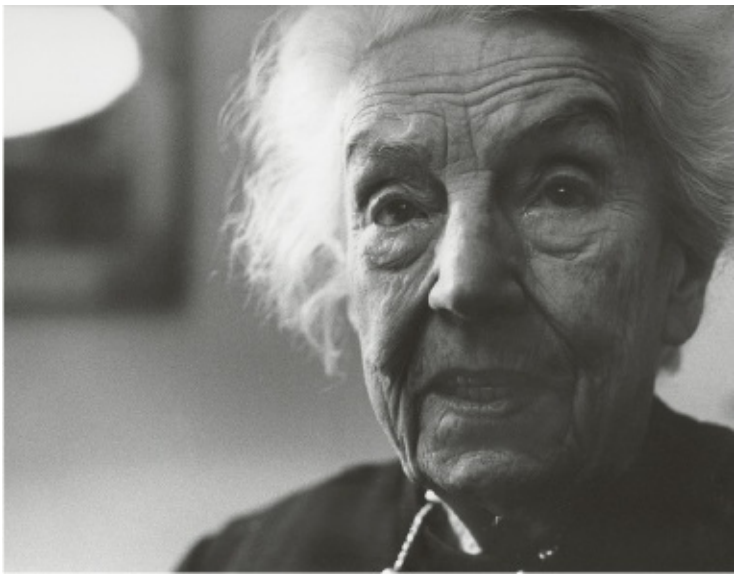


Figure 13–3

Finding the Essential in the Fleeting

A good portrait captures an instant that reveals something about the person that goes beyond that instant; it is the art of good observation to recognize the essential in the fleeting. The facial expression of the woman in figure 13–4 is relaxed and rested in the brief moment captured by the photo, while her eyes look very alert and a bit mischievous. Looking at her, you would recognize personality characteristics such as sensitivity and intelligence. The special attraction of this photograph obviously lies in the fact that the woman resembles the mannequin in the display window—the young, blonde, pretty and a bit naive cliché—and she even has a similar haircut. This obvious parallel of an external attribute formally invites the viewer to make all kinds of comparisons, especially to realize that the woman does not really fulfill the cliché mentioned above.

The photo was taken digitally with the 32 mm focal length of the zoom lens and converted to a black and white using Photoshop.

Digital photography has enormous advantages for portraits because one can recognize facial expressions quite well in the camera display with the enlargement mode and, therefore, can correct unexpected surprises immediately by reshooting the photo.



Figure 13–4

Woman’s Fate in India

Compared to the fate of Indian boys, the fate of Indian girls is even less according to their wishes. Girls are, first of all, less welcome because parents must later pay a sizeable dowry, and second, the birth of boys is regarded as God's blessing. The young girl in figure 13–5 is also from a world that is alien to us, from the rather poor Indian state of Orissa. Although she is 10 years old at most, she already has the expression of an adult, even that of an older woman. Without showing it, the photo tells a story of child labor, poverty, and oppression already evident in early childhood. It can readily be seen in this image that this girl has prematurely lost her childhood innocence. Her expression is not caused by the act of posing for the camera; it was the same before. If I had encouraged the girl to smile, I would have had a more cheerful but less sincere photo. This photo critically shows once more a sociological problem by not stopping at the so-called superficial beauty. The interplay of light and shadow intensifies the expressive force of her face. Needless to say, it was important in the photographed image to retain definition in her eyes and mouth, so the photo, which was taken with an analog camera, was printed on soft paper (grade 2).

This portrait was taken with the 105 mm telephoto lens.

It's Easier with People You Know

You can easily approach acquaintances, and even touch or photograph them in more intimate situations. The blunt crop of the next portrait (figure 13–6) is what makes it powerful: Only one eye is clearly seen, while the left side of the face remains fully blurred. The nose emerging from the blur can barely be recognized, but the eye is razor sharp and the hand on the right side leads once again to blurriness. The image has a certain poetry: The eye reveals some fearfulness and melancholy and the woman places her hand on her mouth while the other hand touches her face. What kind of story is hidden in this small detail? Is the hand comforting the face? Maybe the photo is telling the story of a romance. The photo does not give us a clear answer and that is precisely what makes photography so fascinating—that it is open to many interpretations. Even if the story behind the image remains mysterious, it is nonetheless emotional.

The photo was taken with a fully opened analog camera and a light-sensitive 50 mm lens on a very sensitive film.



Figure 13–5



Figure 13–6

14 Man and Surroundings

Photography can showcase the surface of things, as do the large portraits by Thomas Ruff, one of the world's most expensive artistic photographers. Apart from Andreas Gursky and Thomas Struth, he is probably the best known of the Becher School photographers. To support his viewpoint, he takes portraits of people with a large-format camera, as if he is taking a meaningless passport photo that says nothing about the sitter's personality. He then enlarges this "neutral" photo, to a size of almost 7 feet. You initially get the impression that it is a passport photo, but as you come closer to the image, the face starts disintegrating into its surface components. Standing directly before it, you see only a collection of pores, pimples, and other skin blemishes in vivid sharpness. The character that cannot be captured becomes nothing more than a surface when seen up close. Photographs conceived and enlarged like this do indeed capture just the surface because the nature of a person cannot be glimpsed in them.

Throughout the history of photography, countless photographers have vividly demonstrated that photography is quite capable of going well beyond the depiction of surfaces to reveal personalities. Most of the time, photographers recorded a human significance by placing people in surroundings that would say something about them.

Whereas in the late nineteeth century it was stylish to portray the bourgeoisie in their ambience, one of the first photographers who left the studio to capture people in places having a different special atmosphere was Eugène Atget. Apart from impressive character studies that don't shy away from disreputable professions (rag pickers or prostitutes, for example), he vividly showed Paris in his portraits at the turn of the nineteeth century.

Similar successful fusions of people and their surroundings are also the trademark of the photos taken by the sensitive British photographer Bill Brandt in the early 1930s. He felt attracted to the victims of the new disease of the bourgeoisie: depression. He set out to portray the poor and suffering of his times with a lot of compassion (think of his well-known photos of unemployed miners riding bicycles to collect coal). Another one of the "Sociologists of the Eye" is the famous August Sander, who attempted to typify an entire country (Germany), structured according to the professions of its inhabitants. His best-

known photo of a baker is also a fusion of a person and his everyday surroundings. August Sander even had the opinion that every profession created its own type of person, who would then be photographed by him with some attributes from his professional surroundings.

Fashion photography also dealt over and over again with the fusion of model and surroundings. Naturally, the goal was not to characterize the model with her traits but rather to attach external attributes to the model when choosing the surroundings in order to stimulate potential buyers. Often, fashion photography is criticized for its superficiality, but the history of photography proves the opposite: French fashion photographer Jeanloup Sieff developed a unique style in a powerful way. He almost never photographed his models on the catwalk but placed them in surroundings that were frequently so moody or droll that the atmosphere would almost dominate the models. He often fought it out with editors (of *Harper's Bazaar,* for example) who thought that the clothing got lost in his images. Most of the time, however, he prevailed, and eventually he became one of the most sought-after fashion photographers precisely because of the way he fused natural-looking models in especially atmospheric surroundings.

A highly successful fusion of the person and personal space was the book *The German Living Room* by Herlinde Koelbl and Manfred Sack, published in the early 1980s. The German and his ambience were characterized across all social strata, and their work characterized that historical period as well.

In my opinion, the best fusion of a person with his surroundings can be seen in the book *East 100th Street* by New York photographer and Magnum member Bruce Davidson. After tiring of industrial photography, he decided to photograph Harlem. "I had to make contact with people once again in a way that not only demanded observation and commentary, but participation, a giving and taking, that allowed me to come back to myself." He spent two years working with a tripod and a large-format camera in New York's 100th Street and everyone quickly knew him as the "Picture Man." He took photos for people; every sitter who requested prints was given them. The result was an expression of close participation in the lives of these people and of togetherness. His touching photographs are not images of a voyeur but of a photographer who earnestly cared about Harlem's residents. Thus, his photos are not really pictures that expose ridicule and abuse but rather images of deep humanity that nevertheless look inside the dark side of society.

In the Shadow of the Bronx

The photo in figure 14–1 can be regarded as a small homage to Bruce Davidson. It is by no means the product of a long relationship, but instead of a brief encounter in which the person in the image confided to me, among other things, that he had been unemployed for a long time. I was impressed by the intensity of his features that seemed almost incapable of smiling any longer. It can be clearly seen in his face that this man had lived a tough life—yet he introduced himself wearing a jacket and a clean shirt with a bright collar. He undoubtedly had a sense of pride. However, it was very important for the photo to characterize him in his surroundings, and in spite of the blurred background, the back alley of an American metropolis can be recognized. The twin attributes of brick buildings and fire escapes are enough to place him. In spite of the 400 ASA film, I could only take the photo with the light-sensitive normal lens and a relatively large aperture. It was essential to emphasize the man's features, and the light falling from above was perfect for this job because it made his wrinkles stand out and provided some facial highlights. I had to burn in the surroundings quite a bit in the darkroom to make this unity of man and surroundings more a sociological shadow image. The Bronx is considerably larger than Manhattan and yet is barely mentioned in a tourist guide to New York—is this a sociological collective suppression? This photo also shows how strongly this individual is rooted to his surroundings by how he clearly fuses with them; you get the impression that he feels quite at home here.



Figure 14–1

Nun in Times Square

The young sister in figure 14–2 provides a strange contrast to lively Times Square. Oblivious to the flashing advertisements, cars, and hustle and bustle of countless pedestrians in the pulsating center of New York, she stands in the middle of the street engrossed in her study of the Bible—an anachronism in the modern world. The kind of life and surroundings that have motivated this young woman to follow her religious trajectory cannot be glimpsed in this photo, but her sensitive expression does radiate a sense of calm amid the rather noisy and restless surroundings of the large city. She certainly and successfully asserts herself against her surroundings by not allowing the hustle and bustle to swallow her. Even the photo-taking process (I had requested her permission) did not diminish her concentration on the Bible. A 28 mm wide-angle lens was the right one to use here because you can recognize the background even with an almost full aperture. After all, it was important to wait for early dusk so the neon signs would be clearly recognized in the background.



Figure 14–2

Man and Real Estate

The man in figure 14–3, the head of a Frankfurt ad agency, is at home in the modern world. Man and surroundings fuse here as well. This person, often under extreme time constraints and competitive pressure, must still be creative and innovative. With almost philosophical thoughts of the highest order, he gives modern real estate projects an intelligent image. Therefore, it made sense to fuse him photographically with one of these buildings.

It was essential to examine Frankfurt's Junghof neighborhood very closely with the agency president before the actual shooting, so the photo session would be as brief as possible for someone whose time is so precious. During the exploratory session, the perspective that showed the roofs seemed the most interesting, and I decided that the interplay of both arches should become the

formal, dominating elements of this picture. It was especially attractive for this interplay to be shown in tension with the skyscrapers of Frankfurt's banking district towering in the background, and it was crucial to place the manager at this spot so he would be framed by the bright arch of the roof.

A fill-in flash powered down by three stops provided a soft fill-in light because he was standing in the shadow. The effect of this significantly weakened fill light is that you do not notice the flash in the picture and the face does not lose definition in the shadow. The agency president crosses his arms and looks toward the distance. His posture looks relatively relaxed, but his face expresses the energy of a powerful decision-making individual.

This photo was taken with a 28 mm lens.



Figure 14–3

Indian Yogi

The Indian yogi (figure 14–4) comes from a very different corner of the world. During my stay in an Indian ashram while photographing a coffee-table book, I had many conversations with him. He personally guided me through the yoga exercises, and when he saw me doing them so stiffly, he frequently remarked, "After a few days, months, or years, you will do them as well as me!" For him, it was unimportant whether I would need a couple of days or years—and this is what really characterized him. As opposed to the agency president, he lived in a blissful timelessness not motivated by the pressure to succeed. This timelessness conveyed a hint of eternity, and it was important for me to place him in a

relatively timeless backdrop that provided only one indication of an infinitely long time, namely a dark and eternal-looking boulder that has certainly been around for several million years. So that the boulder would not dominate the composition, it was essential to keep it in the background. The sharp focus on the yogi also emphasized the figure. Because he liked to talk and gesticulate, I had to ask him questions and observe his gestures when he answered them; I had to shoot at the right moment. Although his dark, deep-set eyes find their equivalent in the boulder, his gesture expresses something very sublime.

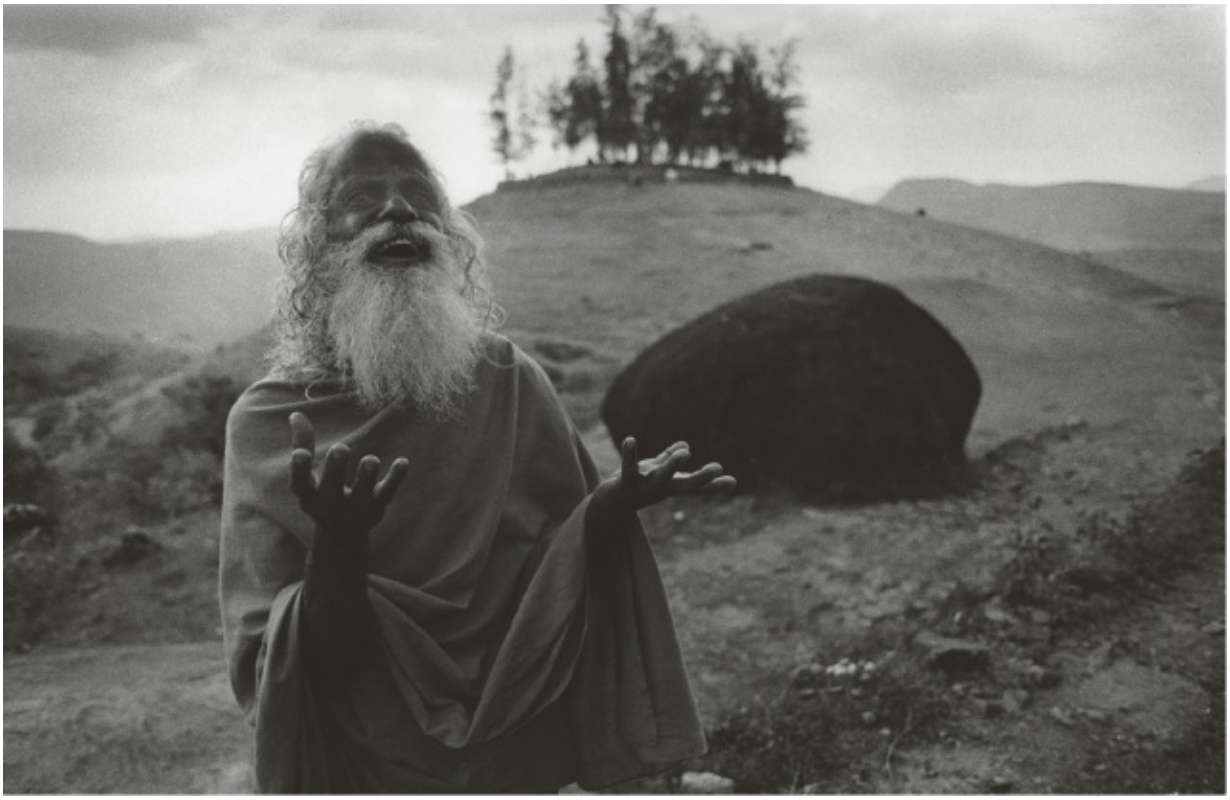
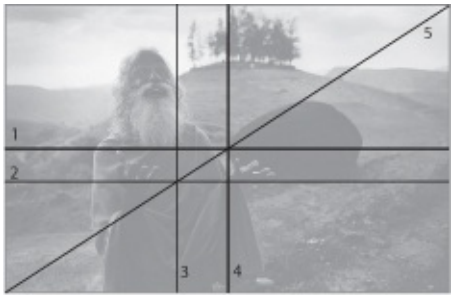


Figure 14–4



1 Horizontal symmetry axis

2 Lower horizontal harmonic dividing line

3 Left vertical harmonic dividing line

4 Vertical symmetry axis

5 Positive image diagonal

In the photo, taken with an analog camera using a 28 mm lens at almost full aperture, the yogi stands out well from the slightly open backdrop. I burned in the sky a little in the darkroom and slightly brightened the eyes with Photoshop's dodging tool after scanning.

Two Smoking Breaks

The next two images both show people taking breaks—a cigarette break and a pipe break—and yet both photos express something radically different. The man at One Penn Plaza (figure 14–5) has little time for a break, while the pipe-smoker (figure 14–6) has made himself comfortable for a longer period of time by sitting on a chair. Their postures convey these differences very clearly. While the man leaning on the glass façade of a New York skyscraper seems ready to jump back to his workplace at any moment, the other one is very much at ease sitting on his small folding chair, also in the middle of New York.

Both persons have fused with their surroundings, but whereas the first man gives a rather cool impression similar to the glass reflections, the man wearing the cap and smoking his pipe looks considerably more human despite the fact that we see only his silhouette. Obviously, the juxtaposition with the floating figure on the large advertisement particularly contributes to the pictorial tension. When taking the photo, I had to make sure that hand, pipe, and face with cap would be placed before a bright section of the background so they could be easily recognized. This photo contains significantly more organic shapes, such as the clouds and the figure in the ad, whereas the other photo places the cooler, more sullen individual within an interesting design of lines, corners, and edges—another reason why this photo makes an uncomfortable impression on the viewer.



Figure 14–5

These pictures demonstrate that the ambience of the surroundings seem to define, at least partially, the personality of the person in a photo. It is, therefore, even more important to analyze the interplay of the person and his or her surroundings as thoroughly as possible in order to create a successful interaction of both of these components with all the tools of the trade and of sight.

The first photo (figure 14–5) was taken with a 28 mm lens, and the second one with a 20 mm super-wide-angle and plenty of depth of field.



Figure 14–6

15 Mystical Photography

The word *mystical* is quite often used without really knowing what it means.

You often hear, “This image is mystical indeed.” And by that, people mean moody or mysterious rather than mystical. What then is the original meaning of the word *mystical?* The original meaning derives from religion and encompasses the idea of a personal, individual union with God. In every religion, there are mystical currents that try to reach a spiritual state through meditation, immersion, or a cleansing of the soul that opens it up for so-called divine experiences. What this really implies naturally goes beyond the scope of this book.

The most famous Christian mystic was Master Eckhart, who repeatedly retreated to solitude to empty his senses from overload and to make himself more sensitive and open for experiencing the “divine.” The concept of God is not used in the conventional sense here; rather, it stands for an idea that there is another, expanded level behind the world as it is perceived by our very restricted five senses. The idea of such a level lying beyond what we can perceive is very old. It crops up in many antique civilizations and philosophic schools; for example, the ancient Indian sacred texts, the Vedas, describe the world as perceived by our five senses as an illusion, or as the curtain to Maya, the name of the world that at one point will be revealed so we can recognize the world perceived by us as only a blinding veil.

However, the anthroposophical movement of Rudolf Steiner also takes up this idea of a delicate world that can be discerned by making the inner self more sensitive. Rudolf Steiner claimed that it was possible to glimpse a so-called spiritual world lying beyond the material one. He thought that every human had a sensitivity with which he could perceive phenomena from the spiritual world after certain training. This may sound off-beat at first, but if you realize that the world is constantly being permeated by all kinds of electromagnetic waves, and that you can perceive only a fraction of them with your senses, then you realize that many wavelengths exist beyond your perception.

Thus, it is not surprising that even modern science questions our apparently durable world of matter. After the world of physical objects is penetrated, the solid world of things disintegrates into the dance of the atoms.

This existence beyond the veil of the physical world—whatever shape it may

have—can be described as the metaphysical world. Aristotle, and many other philosophers, reflected about metaphysics. The German philosopher Karl Jaspers even devoted an entire work to metaphysics. The concept of metaphysics is similar to mysticism. Mysticism comes from religion, whereas metaphysics deals with the quest to find out if there is something beyond the world perceived by the senses. Maybe the concept of metaphysics has a more neutral meaning than mysticism because the latter does not necessarily deal with the divine and is therefore easier to be accepted by atheists.

For photographers, the issue here is whether you can reach into these mystical or metaphysical dimensions or at least hint at them. The connection of photography and metaphysics is by no means far-fetched and has even found a place in the history of photography. Herbert List was certainly at the forefront when he talked of "fotografia metaphysica." Although strongly influenced by surrealism, he took one step further with his "fotografia metaphysica" in the sense that he became interested in the "magic of the appearance." With this "magic," he tried to hint at other dimensions of existence and reach to the very bottom of things. In his photos, he placed objects in strange, unfamiliar contexts or staged encounters between fragments from reality that he uprooted from their origins. One of his best-known photos is *Santorini*, where he shows a fish swimming in a water-filled glass vase that sits atop a balustrade with a view of the wide, sparkling Mediterranean.

Herbert List was intensely interested in Greek mythology, so it's not surprising that he made impressive photos of ancient Greek ruins. However, even these photos show much more than just the object; they point not only to another time, but also to another level of being through the magical composition of the lighting. He also hinted at metaphysical symbolism through the photographic interplay of covering and uncovering. In other photographs, he used mirrors to show the juxtaposition of mirror images and reality.

Needless to say, photography is—superficially seen—the medium that deals exclusively with visible reality, and yet it can hint at other levels, as you will see in the following examples.



Figure 15–1

Sign

The first example (figure 15–1 and figure 15–2) shows a cloud front moving above an arid landscape that gives the image a magical effect. Two marked streaks of clouds cross a vapor trail; the right trail is finger shaped, and toward the lower end you can even discern the shape of a fingernail. An interpretation of a “sign of God” would naturally be a clichéd interpretation. However, that such a clearly recognizable finger in the sky suggests the mystical is certainly indisputable.

This photo was taken digitally and all technical means at my disposal were used to emphasize the effect of the sky. First of all, the polarizing filter was turned 90 degrees to intensify the contrast between sky and clouds. During black and white conversion, the Photoshop red filter preset was used. The pictorial effect achieved resembles that of a red filter on an analog camera. If such an image is converted this way, it is essential to have a TIFF file converted from the RAW mode. If this photo had been taken in JPEG mode, unacceptable noise would have been created in the image upon conversion using a red filter effect, and the tonal value gradations would not have been fluid. In spite of the fact that the red filter conversion achieves a magical effect in a TIFF file, the transitions in the sky are just fluid enough to justify this conversion. In this photo, the contrast was increased a little as well. A less effective pictorial effect is achieved in a photo that was converted without applying a filter effect, as you can see in the smaller print (figure 15–1).



Figure 15–2

Angel as Symbolic Figure

Many years ago, the entire Hamburg suburb of Moorburg became the victim of the wrecking ball so that the port of Hamburg could be expanded. Only the church and cemetery were left standing. This exclusion shows that even in our rational, secularized age we still respect places of worship. In figure 15–3, you can see the silhouettes of a statue of an angel in the cemetery and the form of the church standing out against a dark and dramatic sky. The angel dominates the composition, symbolically raising a hand in front of the church as if wanting to protect it.

The idea of angels lies at the core of Christian doctrine, but it’s also quite

important in anthroposophy or other esoteric disciplines. It is amazing how many people believe in the existence of angels in our Western world today.

In this photo, the angel should naturally be understood as only a symbol, as a figure that may be an agent between the world as perceived by the senses and the invisible metaphysical world. Regardless of how this world may appear, the photo points to it, hints at its existence, and may motivate the viewer to think about the numerous biblical or mythological stories that have dealt with the idea of angels.

This photo was also taken with the 24 mm wide-angle lens under strong backlighting. The sky had to be burned in quite a bit in the darkroom.



Figure 15–3

Transience

The photo in figure 15–4 taken in an Irish cemetery shows transience: A tombstone has always been the symbol of the transitory element of human life and raises the question of the existence of the hereafter. What happens after death? Does the soul survive? Are the promises of religions true or not? Nobody can answer these questions with certainty. “Believe in everyone who searched for truth, but trust no one who has found it,” remarked German journalist Tucholsky. And yet, a mystical photograph is capable of raising existential questions despite the fact that it cannot answer them. This image is not just about the passing of human life but also about the impermanence of the tombstone itself; its broken upper part lies simply by the pedestal.

The photo was taken digitally at f/16 with the 25 mm focal length of a 17–40 mm L lens made by Canon. It was converted using the Photoshop yellow filter preset. I selected the sky using the Polygonal Lasso tool with a feathered edge setting of 250 pixels and darkened it significantly. I then selected the upper part of the tombstone using a 50-pixel feather setting and brightened it a little. These are the steps that produced the wonderful mood in the finished image.



Figure 15–4

Stony Spiral in the Sea

Photos without obvious religious symbols but with a mystical message can also be created. Nobody knows the origin of this spiral on Lanzarote (figure 15–5); it may be the product of land art or a yogi group. In any case, this spiral is somehow out of place on a white, sandy beach; it is puzzling and alien to the viewer. The spiral is a basic and important shape not only in mathematics and biology but in social science as well. There are Archimedean and logarithmic

spirals in mathematics, but especially in nature the spiral is a basic element because many plants have spiral structures. This shows that the spiral is an essential component of creation from which many different natural elements originate and develop. Therefore, this photo not only puzzles the viewer, but also invites the viewer to think about deeper connections. The photo was easily and minimally composed because it contains only four elements: the spiral, the sea, the sky, and the bright clouds.

The photograph was taken with the 35 mm lens of an analog Mamiya 645 camera (which corresponds roughly to a 21 mm small-format lens) and a red filter.

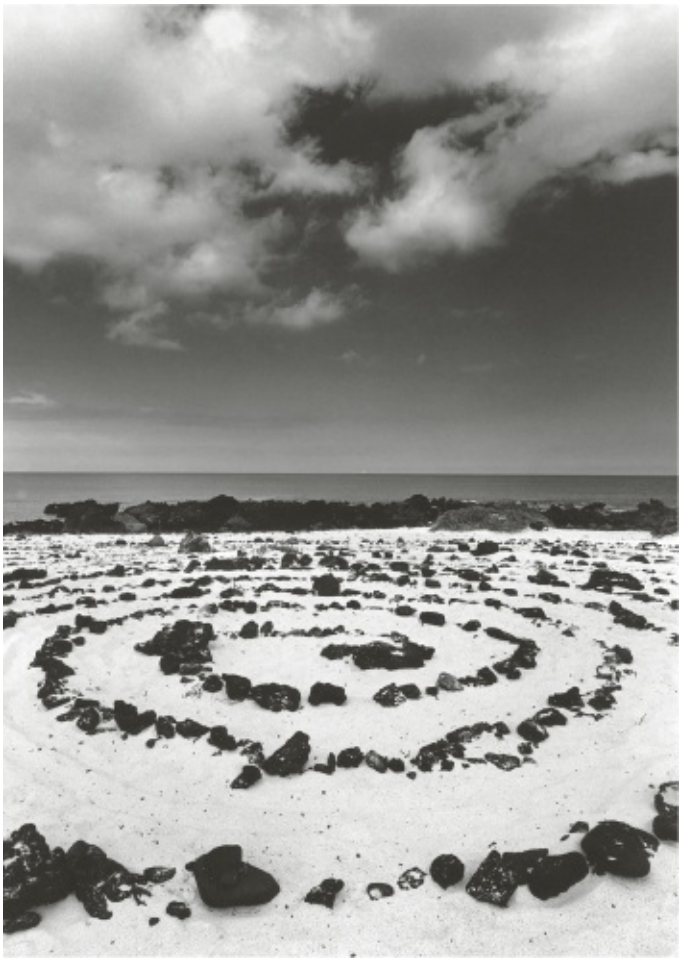


Figure 15–5

Enigmatic Relic

The photo in figure 15–6 also has a metaphysical personality because it leads directly to the enigmatic, invisible, and past world. This relic near Egridir Lake in Turkey forces the viewer to ask questions: What is the importance of this architectural relic? What used to stand here? Why is there a power line up there on the structure? These are questions that cannot be readily answered. The backlighting emphasizes this enigmatic quality. The dark sky with the bright, fleecy clouds intensify the pictorial effect of this photo. The mood of this image could be described as mystical, and by the end of this paragraph the reader will surely conclude that the original meaning of the word *mystical* does not really fit here. Maybe *enigmatic* is a better choice. Photography has limits that will always remain in the realm of the visible, but it is nonetheless capable of interpreting the visible world in such a way that the invisible is hinted at, and existential issues about borderline areas can be raised such as the existence of God, the mystery of time, or transience. As is the case with the nature of pictorial language, the questions remain, and the answers are never one-dimensional or dogmatic, but ambiguous and open.

The photograph was taken with an analog camera, a 20 mm wide-angle lens, and a red filter. Yet, in spite of this red filter, the sky had to be burned in toward the top in the darkroom so it could unfold its full effect.

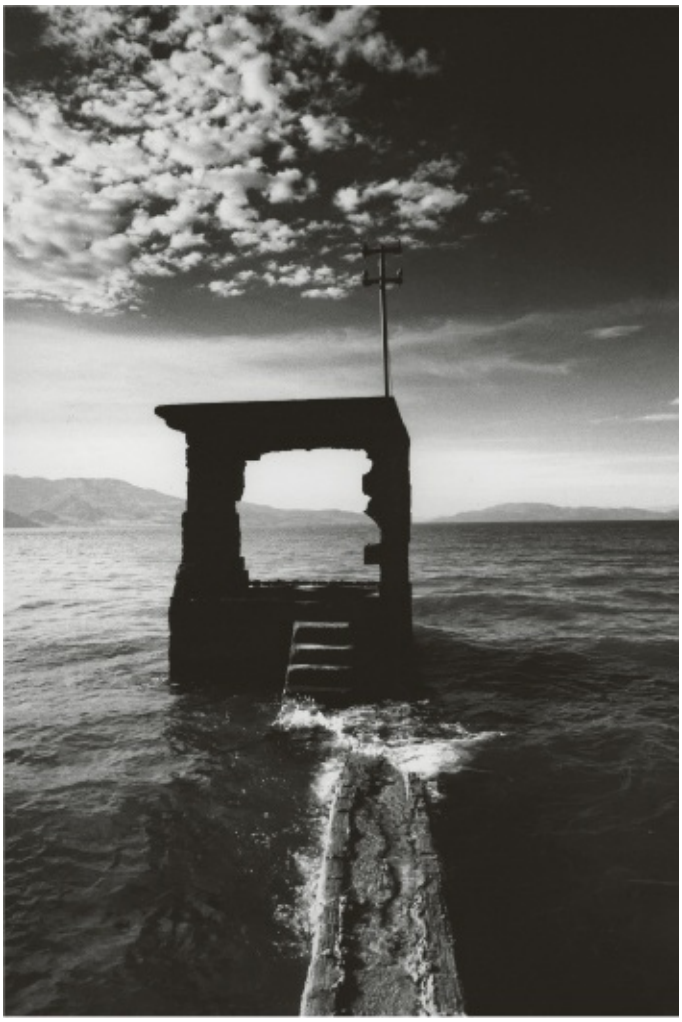


Figure 15–6

Cross in the Sky

The sky is vital in photographs because it leads to infinity, and infinity is a concept beyond human comprehension. Generally, a photo with many clouds creates a certain mood, sometimes even a dramatic mood. In the image in figure 15–7 the sky is dominated by the shape of a cross, formed by the vapor trails of two crossing airplanes. To the right, you can see an old, massive wall whose shadow on the mud flats indicates that it is part of a church. Against this background, the cross in the sky acquires another meaning; it becomes a sacred symbol to the other set pieces in the photo. Mont Saint Michel exudes an impressive sacred effect because the giant rock on which it was built rises above the surrounding mud flats in the middle of the Normandy coast. Taking the shot

at precisely the right instant strengthened the sacred effect in this photo. The crossing of two airplanes in the sky was quite unexpected. Without the cross in the sky, the photo would have been only half as interesting.

The photo was taken with a 35 mm super-wide-angle lens of the analog Mamiya 645 (which corresponds roughly to a 21 mm small-format lens). A red filter plus darkroom burning of the sky intensified the mystical effect of the image.



Figure 15–7

Section 3 Rules of Composition



16 What Is Pictorial Composition?

The space in a photo resembles the tones of a melody that produce a composition. An image is by no means successful simply if everything shown is razor sharp; what is crucial for the quality of a painting or photograph is how the individual pictorial elements relate to one another. An inexperienced viewer looks mostly at the content of an image, but the image is based on an abstract, basic structure that dictates whether its contents will elicit a strong or boring, chaotic or orderly impression—and that is what pictorial composition is all about.

If a classical painter such as Caspar David Friedrich worked on his compositions by sketching various possibilities, we photographers have to proceed in an entirely different way: We imagine how we can frame reality from every conceivable spot at any given time, and we decide upon large frames (wide-angle lenses), medium frames (normal lenses), or small frames (telephoto lenses). We compose pictures only by selecting the frame, the site, and the time. When doing so, we must apply all our pictorial capacity and creative ideas.

Pictorial language has its own laws, very different from verbal language, which is subject to logical thinking. Pictorial laws are partly as old as the Greek principles of harmony. It pays to know these laws so you can apply them to your own composition. The chapters in this section will deal with these laws.

Condensing an Event to a Composition

Let’s see how you can condense a rather banal, everyday situation to a pictorial composition. The weekly Sunday market in Teguise on Canary Island Lanzarote shows a chaotic composition from which it would be difficult to assemble a clearly structured image (figure 16–1). The shapes to the right mesh with one another so chaotically that the photo looks like a typical snapshot devoid of any thought of composition. In addition, the photo has too many elements.



Figure 16–1



Figure 16–2



Figure 16–3

In the second attempt (figure 16–2), the image is structured a bit better

compared to the first. As opposed to the first attempt, the camera used in the second attempt was equipped with the 17 mm super-wide-angle lens. The camera was held more to the left so the cross is now on the horizontal center to indicate symmetry: The left market stall, covered with plastic, is symmetrical to the right market stall. Nevertheless, this second attempt is still unsuccessful because the right side is still dominated by clutter.

A third attempt to achieve a clear composition was to turn the camera to take a vertical photo (figure 16–3), but this image still does not look entirely convincing: The chaotic right side with its stalls and projecting leaves once again subverts our efforts, and the line formed by the roof of a house does not run parallel to the edge of the image.

We have to ask ourselves: What is really interesting in this image? Certainly of interest is the pottery sitting on the whitewashed wall and the plastic cover in the foreground, plus the white house in the background.

A new attempt to salvage the image would be to keep the vertical format and reduce the composition down to its essentials, namely the white pottery and the plastic, the house façade in the background, the cross, and a passerby (figure 16–4). The image taken with the 31 mm focal length of Canon's 17–40 mm zoom lens looks a lot less cluttered and has a better composition, but the photo is not perfect yet.



Figure 16–4



Figure 16–5

Now it’s time to concentrate on the details. What bothers us is that the face of the passerby projects into the dark window on the right (figure 16-4) and therefore does not stand out well enough against the bright background. The photo was taken one millisecond too late and the baby stroller to the man’s right also bothers us.

A last attempt remains (figure 16–5): It uses the same composition, but the difference is that the young woman walking has been photographed in exactly the right spot—she has just lowered her right foot but not yet raised her left one. The final image has been accomplished with this shoot: Only the cropped stroller and the windows distorted by the perspective of holding the camera slightly downward bother us. However, these small imperfections can be easily corrected with the distortion filter and the Aperture Correction option, where Photoshop’s shift functions are located. With the Aperture Correction option, the falling lines are instantly straightened and the intruding stroller has been removed (figure 16–6).

The composition is now perfect because the image has been reduced to just a few, clearly structured elements. The photo describes a banal, everyday situation that is graphically and compositionally interesting because it is balanced in the picture. This photo could also fall under the concept of street photography. After seeing all these examples, it should become quite clear how difficult it can be to condense a (almost always) cluttered reality into a clearly structured pictorial composition.

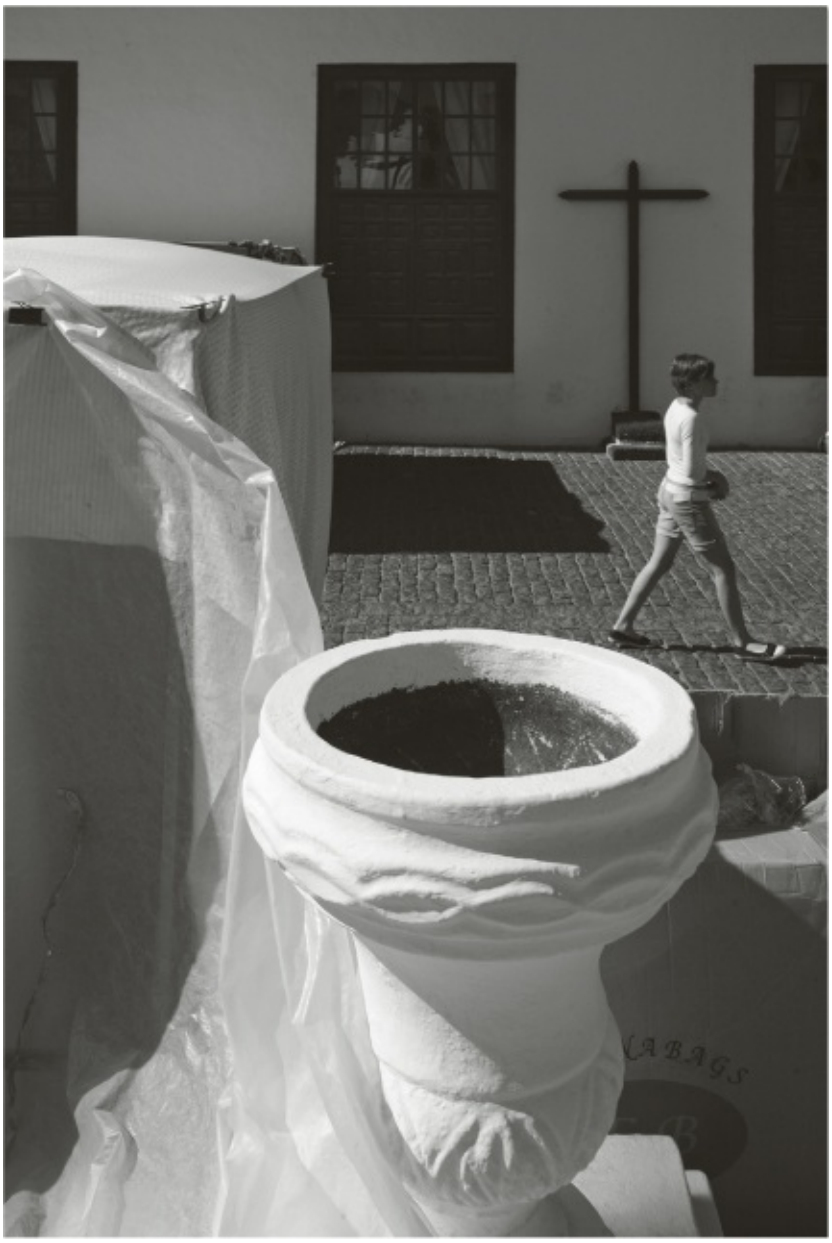


Figure 16–6

Landscape Is More Patient

An interesting landscape is surely easier to incorporate into a photo than the hustle and bustle of a metropolis, and yet a landscape does need the utmost precision in composition. A good photo is not just the product of a quick shoot while strolling by a subject; it requires deep observation and a lot of time.

The wild, rugged volcanic landscape of Lanzarote, for example, may be impressive at every turn, but it can by no means be condensed into a successful pictorial composition from every spot. The landscape is characterized by precipitous, rocky formations and individual volcanoes that project into the wide expanse. If you want to photograph the landscape with a wide-angle lens, you will have to deal with a large foreground area and a big area in the sky that must have interesting shapes in order to have a tight pictorial composition. If you actually experience the reality of a landscape in its three dimensions and are overwhelmed by it, do not forget that this direct three-dimensional spatial impression disappears in a flat image.

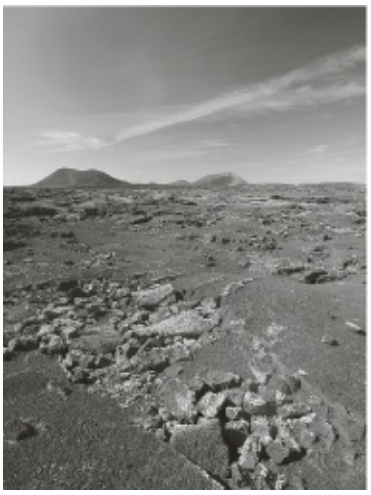


Figure 16–7

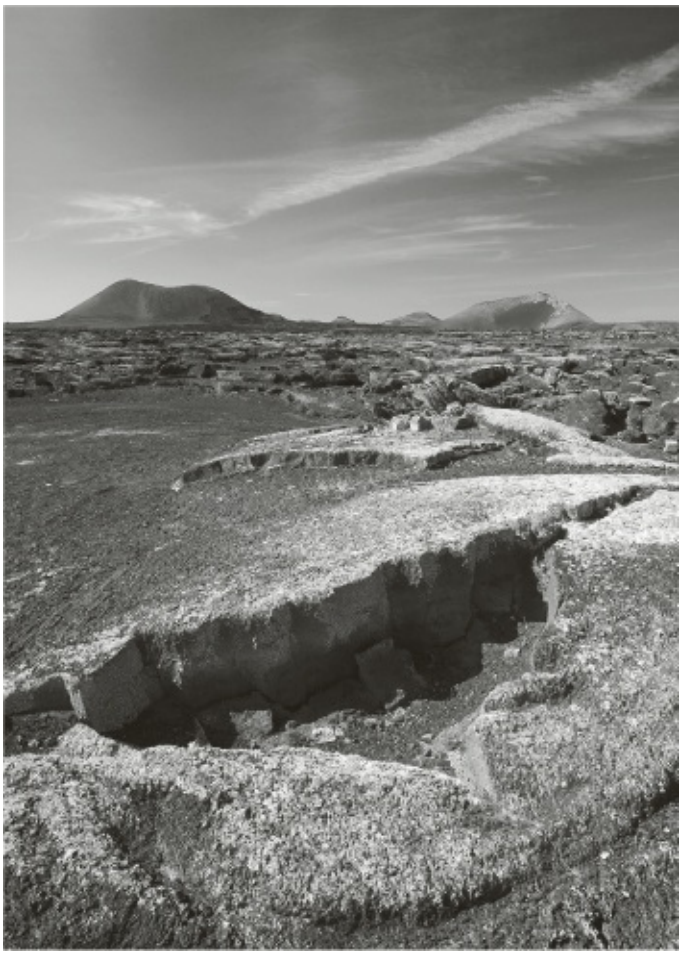


Figure 16–8

The first attempt to create a perfect image (figure 16–7) is not entirely successful. Although the sky does have a good, diagonal structure due to an interesting vapor trail, the large foreground is not interesting. Looking at the digital display, you can recognize this type of problem early because the display is flat as well. If you have already shot a photo like this and are sincere with yourself, you just can't be satisfied with the result. So you keep looking and will soon discover that the foundation for a perfect composition is not really far: The photo in figure 16–8 is a lot more powerful than the previous one, and only because a distinct, rocky formation in the foreground is reminiscent of an open mouth with teeth. In addition, the shadow of this formation runs at exactly the same angle as the vapor trail, thereby building a counterpart. There is a strong tension between these two pictorial elements.

The photo was taken digitally using a 26 mm focal length. On this hazy day, it was not very easy to obtain a contrasty black and white photo, and it had to be converted later to black and white using the Photoshop red filter preset. The

photo then revealed a crisp contrast between dark sky and bright vapor trail. These photos show the difference between an insufficiently composed photo and an ordered and powerful composition.

Getting to the Heart of an Image

The purpose of the small photographic series in figures 16–9 and 16–10 was to bring together the interplay of Lanzarote's typical whitewashed architecture, strongly influenced by César Manrique, with the dark volcanoes rising everywhere on the island. It becomes quite clear that a more condensed composition achieves a better effect.

The first example (figure 16–9) is certainly a pretty good vacation photo, but in spite of the attempt to unite houses and landscape in one single composition, the image looks cluttered because it still has too many elements to be really powerful. The shape of the house in the foreground is too undefined and its flat construction looks uninteresting. As it so often happens, the solution was found just 70 feet to the right. Here a house with a pointed roof has a more distinct shape.

Now, the time has come to wait for the right light. In the second photo (figure 16–10), the upper half of the volcano is dark, and the dark window in the lower-right corner is a distraction. The window in the lower-right corner is the largest dark spot in the photo and keeps pulling our attention toward this unimportant corner of the picture. It is, therefore, better to walk a couple of meters to the left and make sure that this dark spot is omitted from the composition. In the photo taken from this position (figure 16–11), the perspective is perfect, and you can see that with a little additional patience you can wait for the light to provide the finishing touch as it illuminates the volcano's summit. A dark area remains between the whitewashed house and the volcano; the antenna clearly stands out from the dark volcanic mass and indicates modernity in this seemingly oriental scene. The illumination of the volcano's summit and the dark volcanic mass contrast strongly and attract the eye.



Figure 16–9



Figure 16–10

The photo was taken digitally and converted using the Photoshop yellow filter preset. The 154 mm focal length of Canon's 70–200 mm telephoto zoom lens creates a nice compositional fusion of architecture and landscape. Aperture 9 provides just enough depth of field to have both pictorial elements in focus.

This photo series clearly demonstrates what it means to condense elements of reality to a pictorial composition. Especially if you photograph digitally, it is possible to create sketches (as in painting) in the display. Thus, with the help of several photographic sketches you can easily achieve the perfect composition. Digital photography does not necessarily make you sloppier and more careless, as some critics assume, just because it lets you to take many more photos. On the contrary, this apparent photographic wastefulness creates many photo sketches

that serve the purpose of letting you gradually and carefully feel your way to a truly perfect pictorial composition.



Figure 16–11

17 The Golden Ratio and Elementary Construction

Good pictorial design means distributing pictorial elements in such a way that the eye perceives harmony and tension simultaneously. In other words, it is the placement of these elements that makes the composition interesting.

Mathematically speaking, the golden ratio is the division of a line into two differently sized parts. The smaller part relates to the larger part in the same way as the larger part relates to the entire line: a de facto ratio of 1:1.618. The golden ratio is relevant when dividing areas within a photo. The lines that divide an image in the golden ratio (i. e., in an approximate ratio of 5:8) are also known as harmonic dividing lines. Our eye perceives such a division as especially pleasant because it likes to move back and forth between two different sizes but at the same time also loves harmony. This balance between image tension and proportion is achieved with the golden ratio.

The golden ratio (or golden section): *In mathematics and the arts, two quantities are in the golden ratio if the ratio between the sum of those quantities and the larger one is the same as the ratio between the larger one and the smaller. The golden ratio is approximately 1:1.618.*

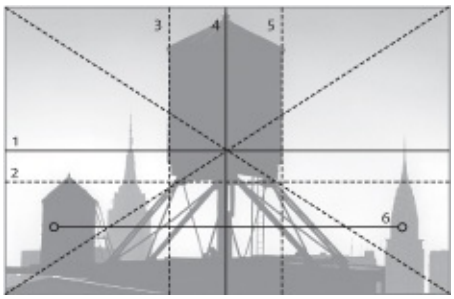
If you divide a photo into both axes of symmetry (the vertical and horizontal harmonic dividing lines, plus both diagonals in the picture), you will obtain a so-called *elementary construction*. However, a photo that clings too strictly to this rule is rather stiff, but if the individual elements in an image follow parts of this elementary construction, it will generally help you to obtain a good, well-structured impression.

Nonetheless, it is essential to remember that these pictorial rules reflect the basic principles of human perception. Therefore, you probably do not need to obsessively follow them when taking a photo because these principles are already inherent in the way the Western mind perceives harmony. Presumably, a Chinese viewer would read pictures differently, not from left to right as a Westerner would. It is better to create photos intuitively.

The objective in this and the following chapters is for you to considerably sharpen your ability to see and shoot photos through the analysis of various pictorial principles but without using rigid “Instructions for Use” for pictorial composition. It is useful for you to know these pictorial principles, explained in the following pages, in order to analyze your own photos and to develop an even stronger pictorial thinking. However, keep in mind something that applies to all academic rules: It is wonderful to master them, but once you have mastered them, you are allowed to free yourself from them.



Figure 17–1



1 Horizontal symmetry axis

2 Lower horizontal harmonic dividing line

3 Left vertical harmonic dividing line

4 Vertical symmetry axis

5 Right vertical harmonic dividing line

6 Corresponding shapes

New York Water Tank

If you want to compose a photo with the golden ratio, it is enough to apply its rules to some pictorial elements, and then only partly or roughly. This example photo (figure 17–1) is centrally composed and includes axial symmetry. The vertical axis of symmetry runs exactly through the middle of the water tank, and both lateral boundaries of the tank are identical to the two vertical lines of the golden ratio. Because this is a backlit photo, the water tank appears in pitch-black silhouette and therefore dominates the image. The diagonal supports of the tank also show folding symmetry. The top of the Chrysler Building (right) is also symmetrical to the smaller water tank on the left. Only the Empire State Building breaks this symmetry and provides some variation in the sizes presented in this photo. Without this break, the photo's composition would be too rigid. You can easily see this rigidity by covering the top of the building with your finger. In the horizontal plane, the lower corner of the water tank runs roughly along the lower horizontal harmonic dividing line. This highly graphic photo has a powerful composition due to its simplicity.

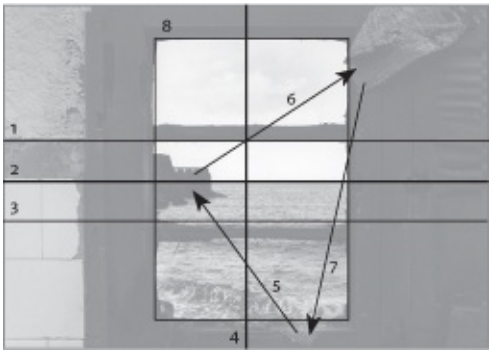
The photo was taken with an analog camera using a 200 mm telephoto lens.



Figure 17–2

Wave Entering the Window

Three elements in the photo in figure 17–2 strictly follow the principles of the elementary construction, or the golden ratio: Both window beams run exactly through the upper and lower horizontal harmonic dividing lines, while the horizon runs across the horizontal axis of symmetry. The newspaper in the upper-right corner also hints at the rising diagonal, however. These elements give the photo a rigid composition, thus conveying a rather static impression.



1 Upper horizontal harmonic dividing line

2 Horizontal symmetry axis

3 Lower horizontal harmonic dividing line

4 Vertical symmetry axis

5–7 Visual triangle

8 Perspective frame

Another component of the composition is the so-called frame of the perspective, the “photo-within-a-photo” (i. e., the window framing the second scene). The photo-within-a-photo was often used by the old painting masters as a stylistic medium to focus the gaze of the viewer.

Needless to say, the special attraction of this photo is the wave structure that links to the cloth structure, thereby giving the impression that the wave can break and enter through the window. The mood looks surreal, and even somewhat threatening.

This example shows how you can use photography to fuse two very different spaces into a single pictorial space.

This photo was taken with an analog camera, using aperture 16 of a 50 mm lens to provide the necessary depth of field.

symmetry: *1. An imprecise sense of harmonious or aesthetically pleasing proportionality and balance; such that it reflects beauty or perfection. 2. A precise and well-defined concept of balance or patterned self-similarity that can be demonstrated or proved according to the rules of a formal system, such as geometry or physics.*

harmony: *A technical term in music, it may also suggest the pleasing quality that arises from a just ordering of parts in other forms or artistic composition (i. e., harmony of line, color, mass).*

The Axial Symmetry of Modern Architecture

The digitally photographed image in figure 17–3 has been strictly subdivided into four sections:

1. The window beams would run exactly through the vertical and horizontal axis of symmetry if the photo did not extend slightly toward the bottom under the lower window pane. This extension adds tension to the very rigid composition and makes the photo stand out a bit. However, if you imagine the photo without this extension, you perceive the vertical and horizontal axis of symmetry that is created by the two crossing window panes.
2. The dark line that runs below the beams describes precisely the lower horizontal harmonic dividing line.



Figure 17–3

3. The somewhat shorter line above the axis of symmetry, although not running through the entire image, clearly indicates the upper horizontal harmonic dividing line.
4. The person that stands to the left in the photo is in a spot that hints at the left vertical harmonic dividing line.

This clear but severe pictorial composition reflects the severity of this modern building located in Eschborn near Frankfurt. The photo's austere symmetrical forms would appear rigid if the organic elements—the silhouettes of the two persons and the reflection of a tree—did not counteract the excessive rigidity of the composition. The photo was taken with a Nikon D70s and a 300 mm lens.

New York Street Scene

A busy, more complex pictorial situation in a turbulent metropolis like New York (figure 17–4) can be composed with the help of the golden ratio so it looks more ordered: • The two legs of a woman appear to be walking on the roof of a bus, while three persons walk on the crosswalk.

• The woman in the foreground looks sideways.

• A man approaches her and also looks sideways, but they take no notice of each

other, depicting a typical scene in a big city.



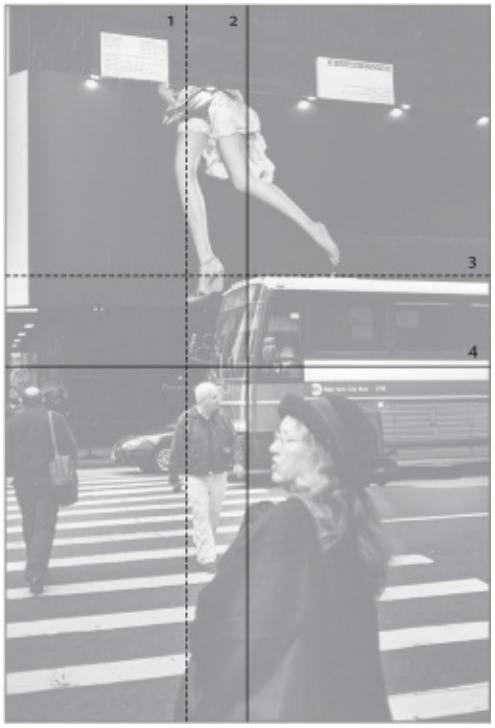
Figure 17–4

But where is the golden ratio? Well, here it is:

- The imaginary vertical line of the woman's right leg on the advertisement (left in the photo) continues with the man below and the left arm of the woman in the foreground and describes the left vertical harmonic dividing line very well.
- The white stripe under the bus windows corresponds to the horizontal axis of symmetry.
- The stripe of the bus's roof above lies almost exactly on the upper horizontal harmonic dividing line.

The photo is, in fact, significantly better composed than it seems at first glance. It plays with the omnipresence of oversized advertising that slowly creeps into everyday life but creates the impact that it should really get due to its size.

This photo was also taken with an analog camera using a 28 mm lens.



1 Left vertical harmonic dividing line

2 Vertical symmetry axis

3 Upper horizontal harmonic dividing line

4 Horizontal symmetry axis

18 Triangular Composition

Triangular composition is one of the best-known classical ways of composing an image. The triangle is a harmonic entity, and this is especially true of isosceles or equilateral triangles, which are optically harmonious. In older buildings, pointed roofs were often built with exactly the same angles so they would form an equilateral triangle.

The well-known German romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich often composed his canvases with a pair of compasses and a geometry triangle to attain triangular composition in his paintings—to the point of even frequently arranging the clouds in his majestic skies in the shape of a triangle.

As far as photography is concerned, the same principles used in classical painting apply; the difference is that you must search your surroundings to find so-called “optical triangles.” In a photo, you can either hint at or clearly show a triangle. The optical triangle in a photo has a very orderly, harmonizing function, similar to the golden ratio, but it can also have an excessively static effect that is perceived as too rigid. Although generally static, you can use an optical triangle to create a dynamic composition, such as using a blurred movement to create a triangular shape.

Dynamic Triangle

The photo in figure 18–1 typifies the modern pictorial language that is featured in photojournalism. It is an example of how you can create dynamic photographs with the help of triangular composition.



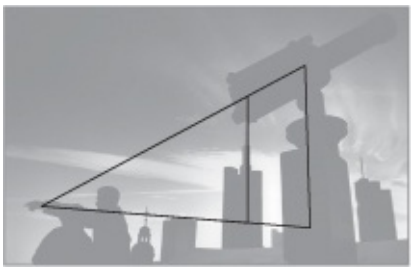


Figure 18–1

What characterizes a dynamic composition? Dynamic compositions live from oblique or diagonal lines, especially when movement is suggested. It's no accident that modern photography so often works with blurred movement, which has almost become a fad.

The dynamic quality of this photo is created by two opposite elements that lead your eye out of the picture: The man points left and out of the image, and the large telescope leads your gaze to the right and out of the image. A strong pictorial tension results from these opposing elements. In addition, the telescope's shape resembles the silhouetted Commerzbank skyscraper. We see that is enough to hint at an optical triangle at:

- The arm of the person represents the base of the triangle.
- The telescope's pedestal represents the vertical side of this triangle.
- The telescope, continuing to the lower-left corner as an imaginary line until it reaches the man's fingertip, represents the diagonal side.

Running counter to the triangle's upward diagonal (which create this dynamic property), a streak of clouds runs parallel to the man's arm. The composition

would have lost most of its tension if the man had not raised his arm at that instant.

The photo was taken with an analog camera and a 20 mm wide-angle lens, which is highly suitable for dynamic compositions owing to its distorted perspective and significant depth of field.



Figure 18–2

Interlocking Triangles

If the optical triangles were only hinted at in the previous photo, they are clearly defined in figure 18–2:

- A triangle is formed by a sloping window strut, its shadow, and the upper corner of the image.
- Another triangle is formed by the dark area at the left edge of the picture.
- A triangle is formed by the oblique line of the dark area, the shadow of the first triangle described above, and the left railing.

The numerous oblique lines in this photo give the image its dynamic quality, yet the repeated optical triangles provide some order.

The slats of the window blinds and their shadows create an interesting graphic structure—yet even this entire architectural pattern would have been only half as interesting without the woman and her shadow. The human embedded within the architecture is the subject matter of this photo, which, by the way, has a touch of a “Hitchcock feel” in it, enough to make it interesting.

The photo was taken digitally using a 18 mm lens. It was important to make sure that the areas illuminated by the sun’s reflection did not lose their detail. To prevent this loss from occurring, the photo was underexposed by 1 ½ stops, and the shadow areas were slightly lightened with the Shadow/Highlight tool.

Central Triangle

Classically speaking, a triangular composition is regarded as rather static, so the following examples will show two relatively static photos, as opposed to the previous two dynamic compositions.



Figure 18–3

The simplest way to create a triangular composition is to use the vanishing point perspective present in just about every roadway on Earth. If you position yourself in the middle of any reasonably straight road and you don’t use a telephoto lens with too great a magnification, the scene thus formed will create an isosceles triangle. In figure 18–3, the sandy central divide between the two newly tarred lanes create the perspective effect. The humor in the image is

obviously the presence of four camels on this not yet opened section of freeway in the United Arab Emirates. This counterpoint gives the image a surreal feel, and the viewer is compelled to ask what camels are doing on a freeway. The composition of the image benefits from its almost complete symmetry, even though the vanishing point isn't quite in the horizontal center of the frame and the camel on the left is further ahead than the one on the right. If the photo had turned out completely symmetrical, it would have been too static anyway.

This was an authentic found scene which I was able to photograph because I failed to notice a couple of No Entry signs. If you are serious about your photography, you will have to overlook such signs every once in a while too.



Figure 18–4

Onion in Stone

Although a special stone is the subject matter of the photo in figure 18–4, the mood is also very important—emphasized by the dark sky and the vapor trail in the image's right edge. These elements also create a second, imaginary optical triangle apart from the stone's triangular shape. The base of this triangle is the

photo’s upper edge, the first side is the right vapor trail, and the second side is the line formed by the distant mountains and another vapor trail to the left. Both sides penetrate the stone because the eye extends them all the way to their intersecting point in the lower part of the stone.



With this interesting, onion-shaped stone in Lanzarote it was necessary to “examine the object,” as former *LIFE* magazine photographer Feininger once said. By that, he meant to explore a subject by walking around it and carefully looking at it from every perspective. When exploring the subject, I decided to include the vapor trail in the composition because it was the most interesting element in the sky.

The photo was taken digitally with a 17 mm extreme-wide-angle lens and a full-format sensor. A somewhat hazy day called for a polarizing filter to be used. The photo now had a nice contrast, and a conversion to black and white using the Photoshop red filter preset did the rest to create a dark sky with a mystical effect.

19 Rhythm—Recurring Elements

Like in music, pictures can be characterized by a certain rhythm. When you include rhythm in a photo, it is important to make the pictorial content abstract and to master the language of shapes.

In fact, the concept of rhythm comes from music, because one thinks of the bars that create the rhythm, but rhythm generally implies something like the constant repetition of similar things, such as for example, the seasons. However, recurrence of does not refer only to time; the space in an image can also be structured by rhythm. If in music rhythm is the basic structure of how time is divided, then rhythm in an image is the basic structure of how a space is divided by the elements.

The four photos presented in this chapter gain their strength of design from their pictorial rhythms; their compositions are simple and they have very few elements. Yet it is precisely the repetition of these few elements that gives these photos their power. Some modern musical pieces (techno, for example) also gain their strength from the constant repetition of a basic musical form. Some African drumbeats are repeated over and over again in ritual ceremonies to generate a trance in the listener. Naturally, with such constant repetition, whether in music or images, contrast can prevent monotony.

Arches, Lines, and Rhombi

In the photo in figure 19–1, the vertical window structures provide the main pictorial rhythm. The arches of the bicycle stands in the lower-right corner continue with a variation of this rhythm, and a third rhythm is provided by the rhombi and triangles of the Western Harbor Tower. A man in the middle of these shapes walks by, and his black and white clothes also fit into the composition. The man, in turn, is the antithesis to the excessively rigid linear forms in the photo. He has been photographed in the best possible instant because he has just emerged from the shadow but is still far enough from the image border. He is exactly in the middle of the Western Harbor Tower. Without this man, the architectural forms by themselves would make the photo look too rigid; he is the essential final touch.

In such a photo it is good to set up the composition and then to have enough patience to wait for the right person to walk by to shoot at precisely the right moment.

The photo was taken digitally using a 160 mm focal length. (You can recognize the telephoto lens perspective by the lines that get only slightly smaller.) The image was converted to black and white using the Photoshop yellow filter preset in the Black & White adjustment tool, and medium-tone contrast was increased a little with the Shadow/Highlight tool. While I was taking the photo, it was important to check that both the white shirt of the man and the bright window elements still had some texture. Before the actual shooting, it is a good idea to shoot one photo as an exposure test.

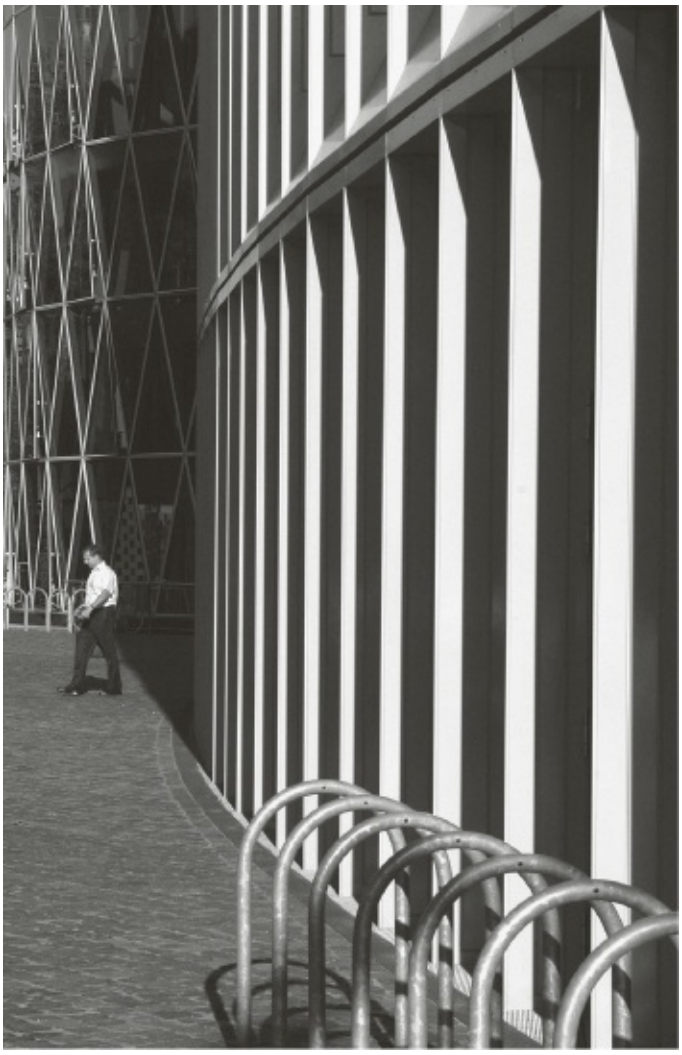


Figure 19–1

Rhythm of Window Lines

The photo in figure 19–2 of Berlin's Potsdam Square also has a minimal composition, with the rhythm being provided by the repeated window sections, which taper off toward the top. If you compare this pictorial composition with a musical piece, you can find parallels: *Bolero* by Ravel is one such piece in which the same basic structure is played throughout, from a quiet beginning to a loud, dramatic ending. The same rhythm applies to the minimal images seen in figures 19–1 and 19–2. The same element is repeated in almost identical form; in this photo, the distances between the lines become gradually greater toward the bottom. However, the antithesis to the rhythm of the lines is also indispensable here in the form of the young man. Without him, the photo would be dead formalism, a rigid linear structure. But, here a unity of man and space has been created in a cool, down-to-earth atmosphere. Nevertheless, the image is powerful owing to the absolutely minimal rhythmic composition.

The photo was taken with an analog Nikon F4 and a 105 mm lens on Ilford Delta 100.



Figure 19–2

Minimalist Structure

If the intention is to let a photo stand out solely due to its minimal graphic structure, it is essential to ensure that this graphic structure does not look sterile. The photo of Frankfurt's Maintower (figure 19–3) has a simple composition: The corner of the skyscraper runs exactly along the vertical axis of symmetry. From this corner, the horizontal lines of the building extend to the left and right, providing folding symmetry. The constant repetition of these lines is what gives the image its rhythm, but it would still be sterile if this rhythm were not broken by individual accents. The windows, opened in various places by coincidence, resemble a melody that is being played according to the basic rhythm. This melody is by all means necessary to make the photo interesting.

The difficulty in this photo was to check how Maintower looked with various focal lengths and to find out in what spot and with what focal length the opened windows would play the most interesting melody on this basic rhythm. In this case, it was the 235 mm focal length of Canon's zoom lens. As in most digital photos, contrast was increased by about 20 percent.



Figure 19–3

The Place of the Conference—Japanese Style

Translucent rectangles directly bordering on each other generate the pictorial rhythm in the photo in figure 19–4. Such window elements are often found in Japanese architecture, influenced by the teachings of Zen Buddhism.

Once again, the person in the center of the image provides the needed antithesis to the austerity of the architectural forms. As opposed to the photo of Maintower, organic forms are reflected in the windows and mix with the architecture in an interesting way. It was important here not to place the person in the dead center but to shift the focal point a little to the right. By doing this, additional tension was created between the larger area dominated by rectangles on the left side and the smaller area on the right side.

The photo was taken with an analog camera and the 105 mm telephoto lens of a Nikon F4.



Figure 19–4

20 Less Is More—Reduction and Emphasis

Cluttered photos confuse the viewer, whereas a successful reduction of pictorial elements provides an overview and generally results in powerful photos. What you need to do is to take your time and look critically through the viewfinder. Fewer forms often have a more powerful effect if they are located just to the right in the photo.

When the painter Kasimir Malevich, one of the most important representatives of Russian Constructivism, painted the first monochromatic black painting in the early twentieth century, he caused an uproar, and nobody appreciated his work. Yet, Malevich's conscious reduction of form and color became the basis of style for twentieth-century painting: the consistently reduced language of form. Picasso is certainly the best-known example, and Piet Mondrian carried out this reduction of form and color in the clearest way. Looking at Mondrian's body of work, you can understand why his rectangles with the three primary colors have become world famous.

Photography arranges elements within an image or frame, and to restrict their number is a great challenge. More often than not, an image has too many elements. How can you restrict the number of elements in an image? Feininger always recommended looking carefully at the object from many perspectives before shooting, which requires time. It is a good idea to try reducing the pictorial composition with immovable objects, which when using a tripod, takes even more time. Try looking through the viewfinder for a long time and ask yourself these questions:

- Is there still anything superfluous in the photo?
- How can I reduce the elements even further?
- Should I approach the subject even closer?
- Should I choose another lens?

Often, if you just walk a little to the left or right, or take a few steps forward, the reduced composition will look better.

Two masters of such reduced black and white photos are the artistic photographers Michael Kenna and Hiroshi Sugimoto. Sugimoto has reduced the world to ocean, horizon, and sky. Two almost monochromatic pictorial surfaces (ocean and sky) of different gray tones have made him famous in the

photographic world.

Arch with Sea

The small photo (figure 20–1) shows an image that is the result of little effort, and as a result it is a superficial examination of the object. The backlit sky is interesting, but the foreground is boring. Particularly bothersome is the fact that a bare tree covers the arched plant, and the right jagged plant is superfluous. How can you produce an uncluttered image from all these elements?



Figure 20–1

The clearest form here is the arch, so it would be a good idea to position your perspective so that the backlit arch is silhouetted against the sky. Because the left arch is in the wrong angle with respect to the magical sky, the only possibility is to approach the right arch so closely that the uninteresting tree will disappear from the image.

In the photo in figure 20–2, the sun is located exactly where the upper horizontal and left vertical harmonic dividing lines cross. If the arch had run to the left of the sun, the right side would appear too empty; therefore, the arch (as seen from the right) must still be placed before the sun. The clouds in the sky add another clear element to the arch, which is the optical triangle, here hinted at by the perpendicular opening in the sky. This line extends all the way to the left (and right) border of the picture. The base of the triangle is the beginning of the cloud formation in the horizontal line above the horizon.



1 Left vertical harmonic dividing line

2 Visual triangle

3 Arch



Figure 20–2

Thus, five basic elements are arranged within the image: dot (sun), arch, triangle, line (horizon), and rectangular surface (sea), and there is also an organic texture (within the clouds).

This uncluttered and reduced pictorial composition is the formal basis to convey the special atmosphere of this place (La Palma in the Canary Islands) in this instant. The red filter placed before an analog Mamiya 645 reinforced the atmosphere of this photo.

Reduced Nude

The small photo (figure 20–3) attempts to convey the tension existing between

the backlit female body and the folds in the bed, but the photo isn’t 100 percent convincing. Therefore, it was essential to take one more step: In the larger photo (figure 20–4), the studio lighting was reduced to only one floodlight that provides a slight backlight (foreground, right). A black cardboard was used to darken the foreground. Now light has been reduced to a hard backlit spotlight that illuminates both buttock halves so they resemble arches.

The camera was placed considerably closer to the subject until the best composition was found—and this composition shows us that, formally speaking, it is enough for the photo to have just two sickle-shaped elements.

The photo was taken with an analog Nikon F4 and normal focal length. The camera was mounted on a tripod.



Figure 20–3



Figure 20–4



Figure 20–5

Digital Control

Digital photography has many advantages, but a big advantage is the ability to use the LCD to control the composition of the scene you want to photograph. When I was photographing the Iron Pedestrian Bridge in Frankfurt (figure 20–5), the camera's display readily showed that the photo—although a nice idea—left a lot to be desired with respect to its execution. Too many forms engage with each other, causing the image to appear a bit cluttered (figure 20–5).

The solution was relatively easy: The focal length of the telephoto zoom lens had to be increased from 180 mm to 280 mm so the image could be reduced to its fundamental graphic composition; all the disturbing elements have thus been eliminated. The task then was to make sure that no passerby would be hidden from view by the bridge braces. The display is ideal for spotting, enlarging, and perfectly controlling these details.

The most convincing image is the one in figure 20–6, in which only one man is seen walking in a triangle between two bridge braces; his silhouette clearly stands out from the bright sky. He is the counterpart to the West Harbor Tower; the bridge almost looks like a scale whose two pillars are anchored in the middle, and it looks like it could tilt to the right or left at any moment. The left figure and the right skyscraper seem to keep the "scale" balanced. Otherwise, the composition is static and almost characterized by folding symmetry.

Because gradient filters are almost useless with long focal lengths, I subsequently added a 15% grayscale gradient to the sky with Photoshop's Gradient tool to darken the sky a bit toward the top.



Figure 20–6

21 Pictorial Guides

The eye analyzes a picture in a totally nonrandom way. Scientific research discovered a long time ago where the eye of a Western viewer will generally enter the picture: If one places a white sheet of paper in the shape of the golden ratio, the eye will first see the part of the picture located slightly to the left of the vertical and somewhat above the horizontal axis of symmetry. You can apply this rule to construct a photo so that the viewer's gaze will be consciously guided across the picture.

It is also good to know that Westerners tend to read images from left to right. In a fully traditional composition it would make sense, for example, to allow the viewer to enter the picture on the left and then lead him to the right so that his gaze will rest in the middle, where the most important section of the pictorial message has been placed.

How do you guide the eye across an image in the first place? Contrast plays a very important role when trying to find out how the eye moves across an image. In black and white photography, the viewer's eye is unconsciously attracted to the contrasty elements or parts in a photo. By consciously arranging the contrasty (and therefore dominating) elements in certain places of the photo, it is possible to guide the viewer's gaze. The art of good black and white photography is, after all, the conscious application of contrast control with all available technical and pictorial means.



Figure 21–1

Three Contrast Points

The photo in figure 21–1 has these three dominant elements: the sphere in the upper left, the sun that contrasts nicely with the sky, and the railing that provides a separation from the sea and determines the photo's pictorial rhythm. The composition of these dominant elements leads your eye through the photo as follows:

1. Your eye enters the image in almost the same location as the spherical structure on the wall.
2. Your eye moves in the direction in which you read, in other words from left to right, until it reaches the brightest spot in the photo, which is the sun hidden behind the clouds in the upper right.
3. Your eye moves a little bit along the fleecy clouds and then quickly toward the lower section of the image.
4. Your eye is guided to the right, moving along the railing.
5. Your eye begins the journey back to the sun and the sphere.

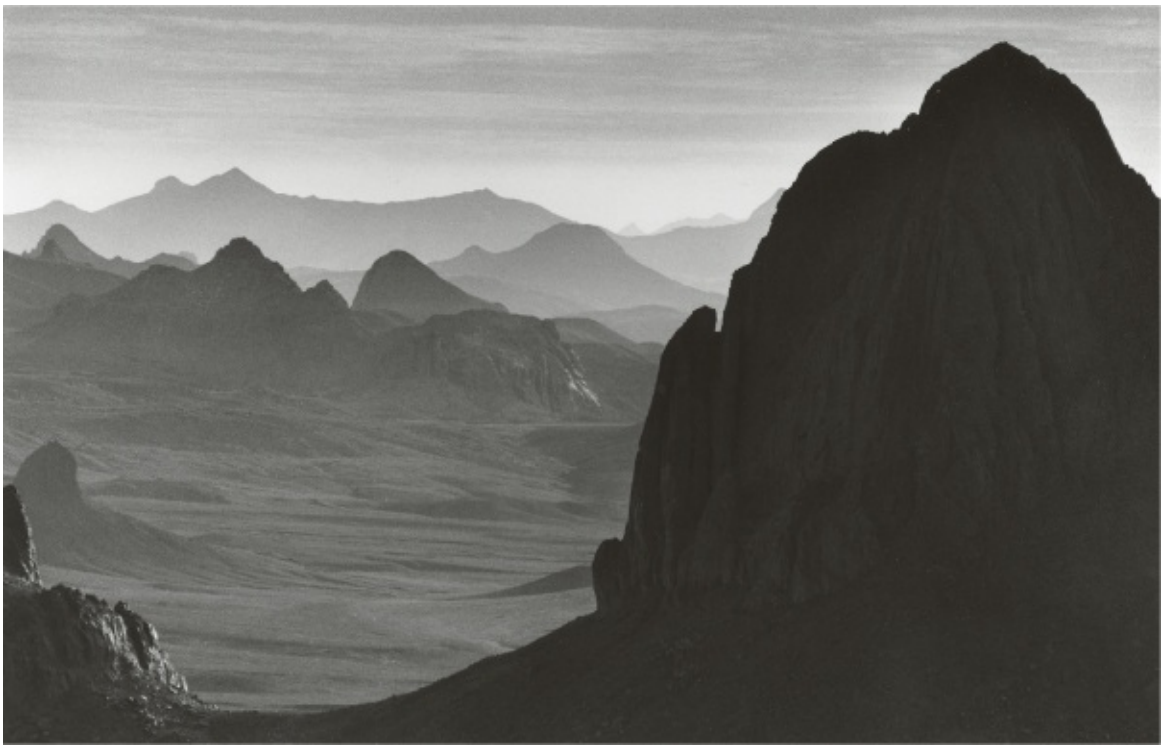
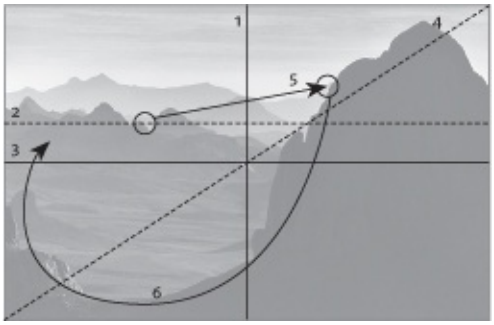


Figure 21–2



1 Vertical symmetry axis

2 Upper harmonic dividing line

3 Horizontal symmetry axis

4 Ascending diagonal line

5–6 Visual starting point (highest contrast) and viewing path

The magical effect of the backlit sky, intensified by a yellow filter and subsequent burning in the darkroom, is important for the mood of this photo.

The photo was taken with an analog camera and owes its depth of field to a 28 mm lens and aperture 16.

Contrast through Aerial Perspective

In the Hoggar Mountains of the Algerian Sahara, you can find sparse, rocky formations that divide the photo into brighter and darker parts (figure 21–2). This division creates strong contrast. The composition of the bright and dark elements leads your eye through the photo as follows:

1. Your eye enters the image in a classical place of entry, where the largest number of different shapes lies. In addition, the contrast between the middle and far mountain chains is most pronounced in this spot.
2. Your eye is magically attracted to the right, toward the section where the largest pictorial contrast is located, namely between the very dark mountain in the foreground and the mountain chains in the background or the brightest part of the sky. It is important for the front mountain to still have some texture so it doesn't look like an inkblot.
3. Your eye explores this mountain, moves along the left ridge to the bottom, and then moves along the arch of the shadow until returning to the point of entry.



Figure 21–3

This photo is a typical example of the intensity of so-called aerial perspective—the fact that objects become lighter as they recede into the distance, especially if the scene is backlit.

The photo was taken with an analog camera using a 300 mm telephoto lens on a tripod and shooting with f/11.

Arched Guidance of the Gaze

In the image in figure 21–3, the path on which your gaze is guided is quite obvious; the composition uses arch-shaped elements to lead your eye through the photo as follows:

1. Your eye enters at a dark, semicircular spot in the sky below the upper left arch that is formed by an exotic plant, and your eye is captured immediately by the arch, of course.
2. Your eye is quickly guided to the small volcanoes in the image center.
3. Your eye is attracted by the pronounced contrast of the plant leaves at the bottom.
4. Your eye is led along the shadow to the right and then moves around the arch to the left.

Such a perspective framework, which can also have the shape of an arch, guides the viewer's gaze in a particularly strong way. The gaze, in fact, will always keep returning to the arch; from there it will move to the most varied spots in the image only to return to the arch over and over again.

The photo was taken digitally with a 25 mm focal length, aperture 14 and 1/80 s, so both the plant and the background are in focus. A polarizing filter increased the contrast between sky and hazy clouds in the color photo, which was later converted to black and white. The yellow filter used during conversion also helped to create a magical effect in the sky.

More Complex Pictorial Scene

Even in more complex pictorial compositions the viewer's gaze can be consciously guided. In the next image, several youths play table soccer on Frankfurt's fairgrounds, a scene that would normally tend to look rather boring. Without a good compositional idea, the result is, in fact, boring (figure 21–4): They all stand in the shadow but are not used as interesting silhouettes—quite the opposite. In the right half of the picture, they cover one another and create a dark muddle. The huge floodlights towering above the left youth draw the viewer's gaze toward them because of the contrast they create with respect to the sky, but they have nothing to do with what is really happening in the picture. Therefore, the floodlights have no place in the composition. What can be done here? A change of perspective would be a good idea because only a perspective from below would make the photo interesting. This superior view does away with the clutter and guides the viewer's gaze; the youths stand out as silhouettes and no longer cover each other (figure 21–5).



Figure 21–4

The composition uses silhouettes as elements to lead your gaze through the photo as follows:

1. Your eye enters the photo at the face of the left youth.
2. Your eye moves quickly to the tower.
3. Your eye moves to the face of the other kid on the upper right because the kid stands out well from the sky.
4. All the faces have something in common: They all look at the small soccer field.
5. Your eye follows their gaze toward the soccer field.

I used Photoshop's Dodge tool so the players would be bright enough and a rather bright corner would attract the viewer's attention. The projecting head in the upper right also looks interesting because it seems to be detached from the torso and gives the impression of almost falling into the scene. It is precisely this head that makes the rather banal scene a fully composed picture, which guides your gaze back and forth between four objects: the second youth from the left, the tower, the head without a torso in the upper right, and the lower part of the soccer field.



Figure 21–5

22 Balance in a Photo

You have seen that every image has an underlying abstract structure that determines its pictorial composition. There are infinite possibilities for creating such a structure, but among all these possibilities one essential thing should not be forgotten: The structure must be balanced; it should not appear to tip over to one side.

Let’s look at the photo in figure 22–1: A window cleaner swings high over Frankfurt in his suspended balcony. The window cleaner’s box dominates the left side of the picture and there is no counterweight on the right but the photo does not become unbalanced. The reason is that we read images from left to right. Your eye enters the photo on the right side of the suspended balcony, looks briefly at the man, but then moves quickly to Frankfurt’s Western Harbor. The main point of interest is the tower located in the center, which is the perpendicular axis of symmetry. Above the tower, you can see a cloud moving in that leads your eye from left to right and out of the picture. This reading movement is precisely what creates the movement to the right that serves to counteract the strong dominance of the balcony.



Figure 22–1

If you turn the photo around, however, the balance is gone (figure 22–2). Now your gaze is quickly led by the floating cloud to the window cleaner and his base. The unbalanced photo definitely tips over to the right because there is too much weight on the right. Its left side desperately needs a much stronger counterweight than what the passing cloud can provide to restore balance. It’s

amazing how deeply the left-to-right reading direction is ingrained in Western civilization, even when you perceive and analyze images.



Figure 22–2

Formats and Diagonals

The creation of balance in an image is one of the most basic criteria of pictorial composition and it can be expertly used in many applications. Various formats and their principles are an important basis for this:

- A horizontal format is likely to be static and resistant.
- A panoramic horizontal is the most static and is therefore a stable and calm format.
- A vertical format is generally dynamic and less stable in the sense that it can appear to tip over and lose its balance more easily.
- A panoramic vertical format intensifies vertical properties.

A panoramic vertical format is wonderfully dynamic here (figure 22–3), where oblique lines create a balance. The photo shows one of the large buttresses and both steel suspension cables of the Brooklyn Bridge in New York. They have been photographed in such a way that the perfectly balanced oblique lines infuse it with life and don’t allow the image to tip over. The steel cables of this gigantic bridge stress the so-called “positive diagonal” (the diagonal moving upward from bottom left to upper right) because our gaze follows it from left to right. In this photo, the suspension lines lead us to the stone buttress of the bridge.

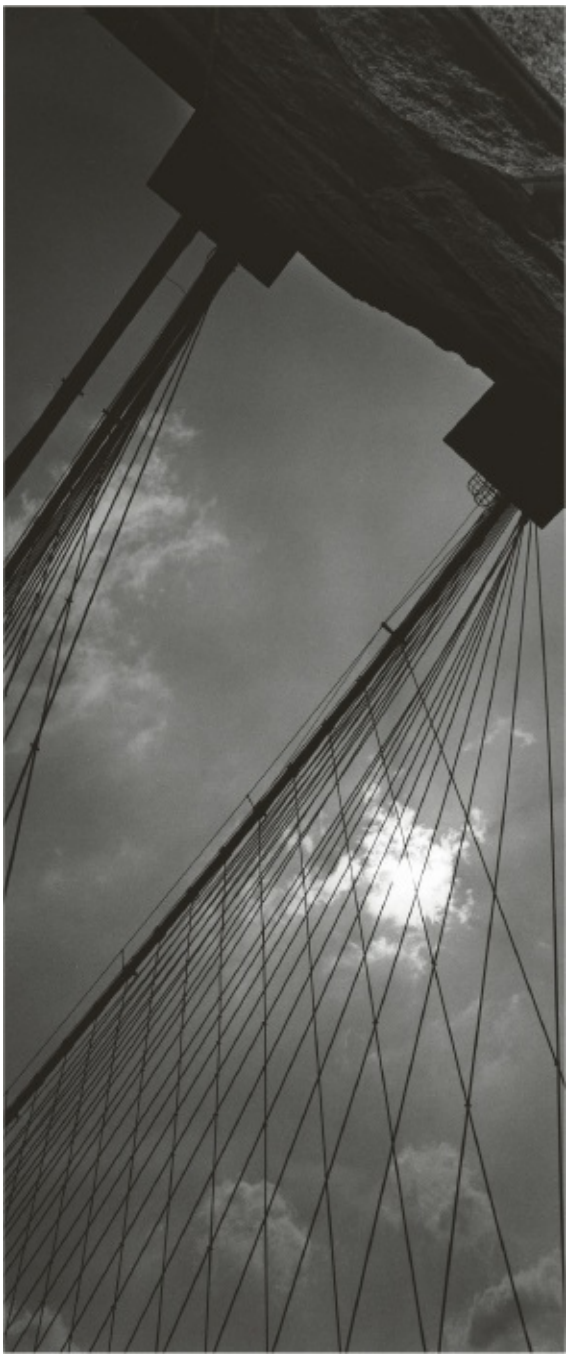


Figure 22–3



Figure 22–4

If we flip this photo over (figure 22–4), the effect is radically different. The eye is now more likely to be led out of the image because the so-called “negative diagonals” that move downward are emphasized here.

The next photo is somewhat more static (figure 22–5). At least the city of New York appears to be resting on a horizontal axis, while two oblique lines move toward the same vanishing point in the upper and lower sections of the image. The oblique lines of the Brooklyn Bridge suspension cables and the shadow of the railing in the lower part make the photo dynamic, yet this dynamic quality is embedded in a certain static order because the two oblique lines are mirror images of each other and can be reflected on the horizontal axis of symmetry. Therefore, this photo is very carefully balanced: Its compositional strength comes not only from the graphic detail of the wire cables, the railing, and its shadow, but also from the mood created by the back-light. To intensify the mood in this photo (taken with an analog camera), it was important to burn in the sky in the darkroom.



Figure 22–5



Figure 22–6

The next picture also has a certain atmospheric quality (figure 22–6). Here we have a statically-composed photo taken in an extremely dynamic format. The photo is perfectly balanced; the frame intensifies the static impression and it is almost a photo within a photo. The urban silhouette lies more or less on the horizontal axis; the railing below lies almost exactly on the lower horizontal harmonic dividing line. In the upper part there is yet another photo within a photo in classical rectangular format subdivided by an arched brace. What makes the photo especially attractive, however, is the courting couple so intensely interested in each other that they do not notice being photographed. The same principle applies in this picture: Backlight creates a mood. The sun shines through a hazy sky, but it is precisely this slight haze that gives the image its special mood.

This photo was taken with an analog camera and had to undergo a long darkroom manipulation to make the sun stand out in the sky; such a lighting situation is the biggest challenge for digital cameras. You can manipulate the lighting by using a gradient filter, and underexpose in a way that will resemble the result obtained with a Mamiya 645 middle-format camera. Such a lighting

situation will really put the actual quality of the digital sensor to the test.

It is difficult to make the panoramic horizontal photo in figure 22–7 lose its balance. This picture was also taken in New York and shows the towering skyline of Manhattan on the opposite side of a lake in Central Park. Yet the skyline can be seen only through a fence. Father, mother, and child “hang on” to this fence—family idyll and urban idyll are separated from one another by this fence. Is this photo trying to say something once again? Why has this small lake in Central Park been fenced in and was it necessary? Why must nature be protected from humans in the twenty-first century? In any case, the fence does not seem to bother the family as they enjoy the urban idyll by looking through the small openings of the fence.



Figure 22–7

23 Unusual Perspectives

Good photography is the result of the photographer developing an individual style and using it to express what he/she really cares about. Perspective, used to photograph the subject within its surroundings, plays an important role in this expression. To best use perspective, it is essential for you to know the principles of the various focal distances. Please allow me to repeat this once again as it cannot be stressed often enough: Reality is three-dimensional, but photography forces this three-dimensional reality onto a two-dimensional surface. And on this surface, different spaces are placed in certain relationships to one another even though they often have no connection to each other in real life. The wide-angle lens is the most suitable tool for joining two radically different premises. The wide-angle lens has other advantages for making use of unusual perspectives:

- It distorts perspective.
- It makes objects stand out from the normal visual horizon.
- Faces look strange.
- Buildings acquire dynamic vanishing points.
- The foreground and background look completely different.

Thus, wide-angle lenses are particularly suitable for playing with unfamiliar perspectives. (Telephoto lenses, on the other hand, compress spaces and can make them look like a jumbled mass.)

The Russian photographer Aleksandr Rodchenko, mentioned earlier, was a pioneer in the use of unfamiliar perspectives. One of his best-known pictures shows a trumpet player photographed from below and with his cheeks full of air. However, with regard to architecture, he turned the world literally upside down—the most unusual views of the world were his trademark. To follow his steps means to analyze the objects that you want to photograph from all possible angles. You need true enthusiasm to even lie down on the ground and get your clothes dirty or to climb a ladder or shoot from a rooftop; these are small prices to pay to capture an unusual photo.

Another master of unusual views was Otto Steinert, who became known for “subjective photography.” This former teacher in Essen’s Folkwang School was one of the most important postwar German photographers. He taught his pupils

to use photography to express the various facets of their personalities. To bring such a subjective expression into their own photos, it was necessary to surrender to their own intuition in the search for subjects. Once the place was found in which the “inner pendulum” had swung, they would explore it thoroughly. It was essential to be disciplined and look at the subject from all perspectives first, allowing unconventional views to be discovered before photographing it. These unconventional views, in turn, were one of many requirements for developing an individual pictorial language.

Headstand

You may think that the photo in figure 23–1 has been printed upside down. Not so! The woman appears to be upside down because the photo is of her reflection. The photo was taken in an interesting building complex in Frankurt’s suburb of Taunus, where there are bridges made of glass that link one building to another. And these bridges are reflected from below. In the upper part of the photo, you see the lower part of a reflective bridge in which the woman is mirrored, and she seems to be doing a headstand. A certain distance behind, you can recognize a section from the main building. In the foreground are the top sections of a moving sculpture. Because these sections were constantly changing, it was very important to make sure that they would fit into the composition. They have a vital function in this photo because they break the strict dual division of the image and bring a dynamic quality into it. Even here, it was essential to look carefully at the subject first and to turn the world upside down later.



Figure 23–1

The photo was taken digitally and was converted to black and white using Photoshop. I brightened the upper part of the frame, having selected it with the Polygonal Lasso, and increased contrast for the entire image.

Person from Below

The photo in figure 23–2 captures a rare look at a person at Berlin's Potsdam Square. From the basement of the Sony Center, you can look up to this lath floor. It was important to shoot at the instant when the woman had both feet on the ground to achieve this unusual perspective of a walking person. It was also important to make sure the woman would be in the middle: Her centered position structures the pictorial composition and makes her stand out from a calm, medium-gray background. She would not have stood out well had she been in the right part of the photo, and the left part would have been too cluttered. However, it is advantageous for pictorial tension that you can see a couple of graphic shapes in the image (the roof of the Sony Center) that provide some tension with respect to the round light in the lower right. Without this light, the entire right side of the image would have been dead.

This photo was also taken digitally at full aperture and a shutter speed of 1/60 s which led to a slight blur because it was shot without a tripod. Photoshop's Smart Sharpen tool counteracted this blur a little bit.



Figure 23–2

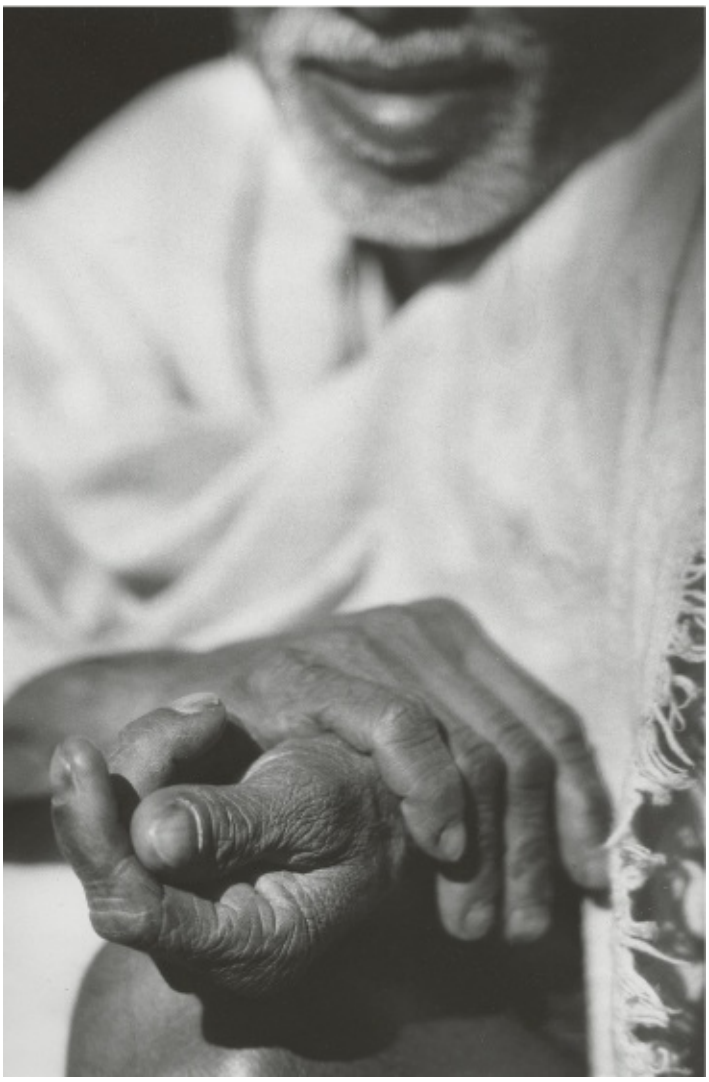


Figure 23–3

Indian Village

A divergence from the classical viewpoint is also the crucial design element in the photo in figure 23–3: Instead of focusing on the face, why not focus on the hands? To achieve this, it was necessary to get to know life in a primal Indian village intimately and become so familiar with the villagers that as a photographer I could move around freely and people would regard it as normal as I took their photos.

This photo is of a man who leads a very simple life, compared to our standards, and has devoted his entire life to farming and cattle breeding. His

worn hands tell his story. The man's face is somewhat blurred in the background, though his gray beard suggests that he is old. The pictorial tension of this photo is found in the way the two poles (i. e., the two hands) and the blurred part of the face relate to each other.

The photo was taken with an analog camera and a 50 mm lens.

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compositional poles: *Used in a picture with more than one center of attention, they are usually placed toward the edges to achieve a so-called bipolar pictorial composition. If the two poles are equivalent, the eye does not rest because it will always keep moving back and forth between the two.*

New York Subway

The photo in figure 23–4 tells the story of a different world: A young man wearing sunglasses and a jacket holds on to the handle of a New York subway car. Here, we have once again an unusual perspective from below that makes the image interesting. The man's arm running diagonally through the image greatly dominates the composition and makes it highly dynamic. The braces in the roof of the subway car run obliquely in an opposite direction, and one brace even runs across the man's face, almost giving the impression that he has been skewered.

In contrast to the photo of the Indian, this man radiates coldness; the subway is only a fleeting place of residence in the fast-paced microcosm of urban life. Whereas the photo of the Indian conveys deep roots and tranquility, this image shows us the dynamic hustle and bustle of New York urban life in which the individual remains anonymous, even hiding behind sunglasses in the rather dark world of the subway car.

Edward Weston started photographing people in the New York subway as early as in the 1920s. He hid his camera behind his jacket and shot the photo through a button hole. To take this photo, I placed the camera on my knee, and the composition was a calculated guess because I could not see through the viewfinder. With a little practice, it is possible to shoot people without them noticing (in this case, the clicking of the Mamiya wasn't heard because of the loud sound of the moving subway) and thus obtain acceptable pictorial compositions with unusual perspectives, as is the case here.

This photo was taken with an analog Mamiya 645 and a Fuji Neopan 400

pushed to 800 ASA using a super-wide-angle lens.



Figure 23–4

24 How to Deal with the Center of an Image

Most beginners place the center of interest of their photos in the middle without giving it much thought. When is center placement a good idea and when is it not?

Camera technique—especially with easy, self-focusing cameras, which adjust sharpness in the center—makes it easy for you to place subjects in the center of the image. Most of the resulting photos, however, lack sufficient tension. Therefore, it is an especially good idea for beginners to consciously force themselves to place the subject off center and to structure their image so that it is focused on two main points of interest (the next chapter will show you how to do it).

However, under certain exceptional circumstances, it might be a good idea to put the center of attention in the middle, and it also makes sense to sometimes compose symmetrically. The Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkowski, for example, always stressed the power of symmetry and therefore of center-weighted pictorial composition to achieve an archaic, sacred effect in the image. His films *Nostalgia* and *Solaris* are emphatic examples of the force that this kind of composition has.

Another option for center placement is to use a vanishing perspective, which achieves a pictorial effect by pulling the viewer into the image as if by suction—thus creating movement in the picture to make it interesting and to prevent boredom. Circular composition is another kind of composition that uses center-based design.



Figure 24–1

Vanishing Perspective in the Tunnel

The extreme vanishing perspective pulls your focus into the dark vanishing point located in the center of the landscape (figure 24–1). However, what lies beyond this dark point? Is it a tunnel? What function does the tunnel have? The image leaves these questions unanswered and therefore has a surreal effect. Your eyes are inescapably attracted to the tunnel entrance by the two vanishing lines located along the central perspective. The black spot, to which your gaze always inevitably falls, unfolds a somewhat haunting magic. After all, the barren landscape with scanty vegetation does not look cozy in the first place, and the path leading to the tunnel makes it look rather eerie. With this subject, a center-based composition makes sense in spite of the fact that the black spot is located a bit to the right, something the eye does not notice at first.



Figure 24–2

The photo was taken with the 35 mm wide-angle lens of an analog Mamiya 645 (which corresponds to a 21 mm lens in small format) and the negative was scanned and processed with Photoshop. The medium-tone contrast was increased by about 30%.

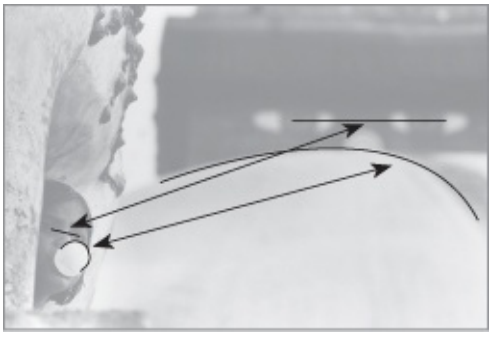
This next photo (figure 24–2) has also been composed virtually around the center, but after looking at it more carefully, you notice that the vanishing point is located a little to the right and especially above the middle. You already know that the eye loves dissimilar sizes even if they almost look identical, as is the case here and in the previous image. And yet, the total impression here is of a composition that stresses the center, which once again makes sense because your eye is pulled into the depths by the center-based perspective. All four oblique lines in the image lead the eye to the vanishing point.

Additional compositional strength is found in the repeated light and shadowed squares on each side of the image, which taper off toward the vanishing point. Naturally, this photo is full of symbols and it conveys a bit of a Hitchcock-like atmosphere. The lack of perfect focus does not diminish pictorial impact.

The photo was taken with the 35 mm lens of a small analog viewfinder camera at full aperture at 1/15 s without a tripod during a backpacking tour.



Figure 24–3



Child and Buddha

Contrary to the two other photos, the one in figure 24–3 is composed in a completely asymmetric way. The most important element in it, the girl's face, is in the lower-left section of the image, and the counterweight, the Buddha's eyes, are in the upper-right section. The child, who is seen here blowing a bubble with her gum, is linked to the sublime eyes of the Buddha in a way that is open to many interpretations: perhaps profane versus sacred or the innocence and freedom of a child versus the innocence and freedom of the Buddha.

I especially recommend such pictorial compositions to amateurs: Place the essential element on the edge of the photo and then search for a counterweight and incorporate it into the image. This creates tension, as you will see in the next chapter.

The photo was taken with an analog camera without a tripod, using a 105 mm telephoto and shot at 1/250 s. Due to the mediocre lighting conditions, I had to shoot at full aperture, and therefore, the depth of field is minimal. Obviously, it made sense to focus on the child even if it blurred most of the image.

New York Street Scene

In the photo in figure 24–4, your eye is disappointed at first because the center is mostly empty, filled only by surface lines created by the skyscraper's structure. A person stands before this sterile wall, and a rapidly moving, slightly blurred person wearing a cap walks by in front of the camera. An essential element in this picture is the view of the background seen in the right edge because it creates pictorial tension and spatial depth. If you cover this edge, the photo becomes flat and loses tension. This proves that even the edge of a photo can be essential for pictorial composition: Although not much occurs in the center, the narrow edge teems with structures and activity. Piet Mondrian often composed his abstract canvases with centers filled only by large, white surfaces and edges filled with small surfaces painted with the three primary colors.



Figure 24–4

I must remind you that this photo—a typical, every-day scene in an urban setting, in which three people just walk by each other without engaging in any mutual contact—would have looked boring without the two people in the foreground. Their surroundings are sterile and almost capable of crushing and converting them to small, scurrying little wheels amid the urban hustle and bustle.

This photo was taken with an analog camera using a 28 mm lens. I composed the elements by placing the centers of attention in the right and lower edge of the image rather than in the center.

Circular Composition

The circle, a compositional element of calmness, symbolizes unity in the visual arts and architecture. Interestingly, the builder of this uniquely designed, modern building in Bad Homburg near Frankfurt did not place the brace exactly through

the middle of the circle, and therefore, this element of the centrally composed photo (figure 24–5) is not its exact axis of symmetry either. As I have mentioned, the eye loves dissimilar sizes that cannot be immediately comprehended. Here, the circle provides a framework for perspective and leads your gaze to the inner patio of the building; the woman walking by makes the photo come alive. After all, this is a structure built for people, and it was especially important to show the relationship between humans and their spatial surroundings. The photo was taken digitally using a standard lens.

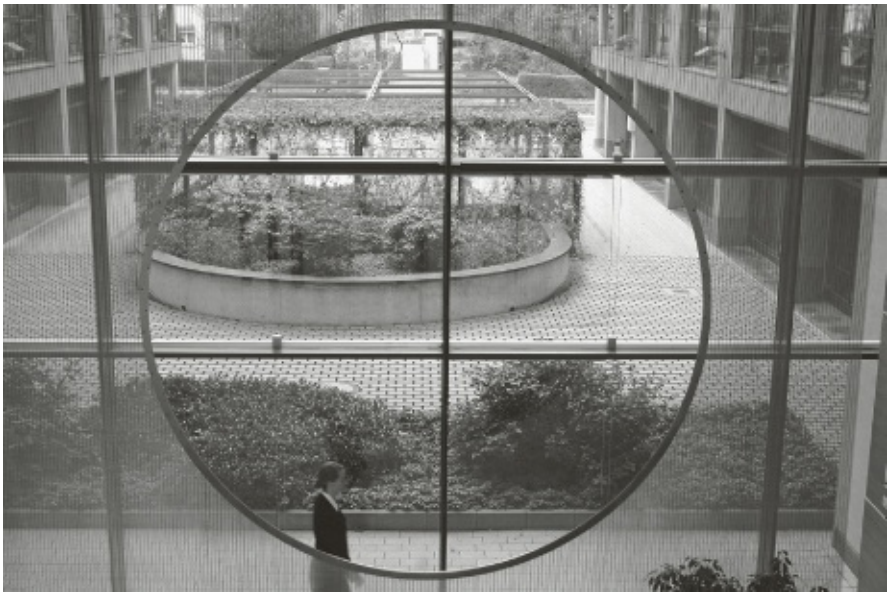


Figure 24–5

However, a circular composition does not have to be dominated by a circular shape; an ellipse also has the same impact of unity. In the next photo (figure 24–6), several cars have left their circular tracks in the foreground as the drivers turned them around. The small cemetery chapel in the background has a layer of dark slate, and this dark chapel is precisely what intensifies the photo's surreal effect, whereas the circle in the foreground represents unity and harmony. Here, it would have been inappropriate to attempt to create tension through an asymmetrical composition, but a symmetrical pictorial composition, supported by a circle, intensifies the archaic or—as is the case here—sacred impression of this image.



Figure 24–6

This photo was taken with an analog camera with a 28 mm wide-angle lens.

25 Pictorial Tension between Two Elements

Two opposing poles create magnetic tension, and something similar happens with pictorial tension. However, how do you provide tension in a photo?

You already saw how a photograph with good composition consciously leads you through the image, and you also learned how photographs can be rhythmically composed. Now I am going to explain how to achieve pictorial composition by concentrating the center of attention in two poles and including some rhythmic elements in it.

If you reflect a bit about composition in photography, you'll realize you probably tend to choose a particular subject such as a pretty house, a person, or a special tree and then you place the subject either in the middle or (a better alternative) in the golden ratio. This is not necessarily bad; in most cases, you get rather calm photos, but in the worst-case scenario, you get boring images.

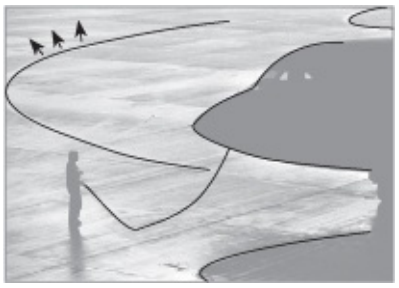
To avoid boring photos, you can compose a picture with two centers of attention and place them preferably toward the edges to achieve a so-called bipolar pictorial composition. If the two poles are equivalent, the composition does not let the eye rest because it will always keep moving back and forth between the two centers. Our eyes love this kind of restlessness, which imparts a dynamic quality to a photo.

Airplane on the Line

Man and technology represent two poles of tension that have influenced our world in an amazing way in the last 100 years. Aviation is only one example demonstrating that humans can surpass their own limits in many different ways.



Figure 25–1



Here (figure 25–1), pictorial tension is created by both the abrupt crop of the airplane and the backlight that reduces man and machine to strong silhouettes. However, the composition is also determined by a third element, namely the repeating shape of the arch that also provides the pictorial rhythm. The arch determines not only the form of the airplane nose and its shadow, but also the shape of the cable and the two traces on the airport surface.

In this photo, pictorial tension has a formal and content-related component because it might provoke philosophical talk about the tense relationship between man and alleged technological marvels. In the meantime, this image could very well represent not only something positive—how mankind has advanced technologically—but also something negative because aviation can contribute to

global warming. Humans invent outstanding technology, but they may become technology's victim in the future.

The photo was taken with a 200 mm telephoto lens and an analog Nikon F4.

Dunes in the Sahara

The Sahara is one of the most fascinating regions on this planet. The region's seemingly endless expanse of sand dunes cries out for a good composition. In the photo in figure 25–2, the early morning or late afternoon hours create an interesting interplay of light and shadow because the sun is very low. To make sure the landscape does not look too monotonous, the sand dunes provide pictorial tension. In this sea of sand dunes, an especially large dune provides a counterweight to the smaller dunes in the bottom left. However, what provides most of the tension is that the large dune has been placed too far to the right. Another dune in the background (left border) creates a counterweight. If you cover the left third of the image, you can notice how the photo loses its balance and seems to tilt to the right. The total picture is balanced, however, because the sand dune chain located in the upper left is the counterweight to the large dune that is placed too much to the right. All these elements provide a strong tension in this balanced photo. The photo was taken with an analog camera and a 105 mm telephoto lens.

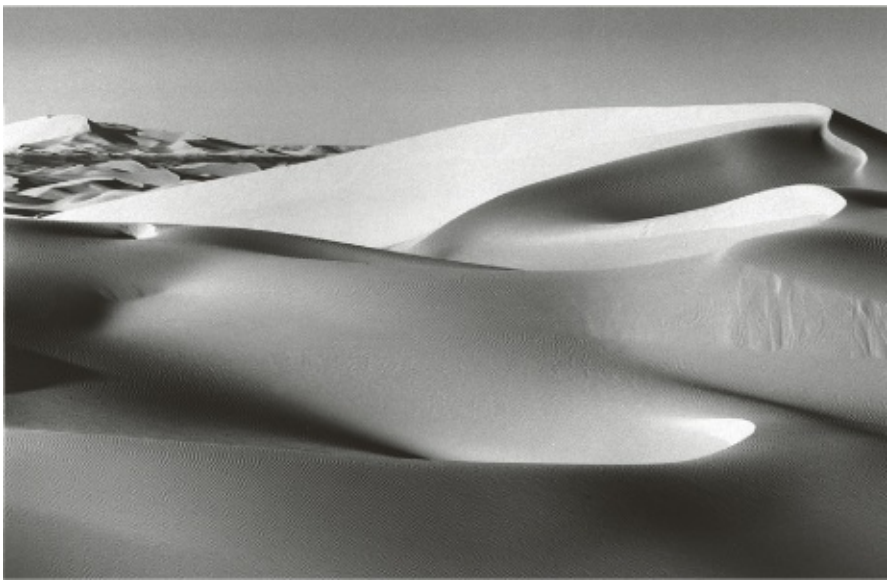


Figure 25–2

A Glance out of the Picture

For a long time, serious photo clubs emphasized a classical rule of composition: People should not move out of the picture, but rather into it. This seems logical at first because such a composition leads your gaze into, not out of, the picture. Modern pictorial language, however, no longer follows this classical rule, because it is perceived as overly conventional. In photojournalism, we often see people in the edges of pictures looking away from the camera or their blurred images moving out of the photos.

In the next photo (figure 25–3), instead of humans, two camels turn away from each other. Each one leads your gaze out of the image—yet, this is what gives the photo considerably more tension than if both camels had turned toward each other. The eye is forced to move back and forth between the two directions indicated by the camels, and yet the photo has sufficient calmness because it has an axis of symmetry (although this axis has been slightly broken because only the shadow of the right camel can be seen). This prevents the composition from becoming too rigid. The photo was taken with an analog camera using a 105 mm telephoto lens.



Figure 25–3

Spotlight

An Irish landscape is usually characterized by dark clouds and saturated greens, therefore black and white photography may not be the ideal medium to photograph it. And yet, precisely because black and white will not register these saturated colors, the interplay of light and shadow, rather than color, composes the image (figure 25–4). A green mountain such as this one would be completely uninteresting for a black and white image if not for the exciting, endlessly changing lights and shadows falling on it, which make the landscape exciting. The trick is to make use of this interplay of light and shadow to compose and create tension; in this photo the lower circular spotlight is what gives the image all its tension. If you cover the spotlight, the photo loses its tension and the entire lower part looks dead. You have learned that the eye is led through an image by contrasting spots, and in this photo there are two contrasting spots, or poles, that provide tension: the light spot in the cloud to the left and the elongated light spot on the mountain that leads the eye left to right and stops just before it reaches the edge. (A third tension pole is located between this elongated light spot and a smaller one in the lower part of the image.)



Figure 25–4

The photo was taken digitally with the 87 mm focal length of a Canon 70–200 mm telephoto lens. I used Photoshop's Dodge tool to brighten the light falling on the mountain by about 15%. The medium-tone contrast of the image was also increased by about the same factor.

26 The Image within an Image

The so-called frames of perspective (an image within an image) create a view and concentrate the viewer's gaze. This form of pictorial language was employed by the Old Masters; one of the best-known examples of the use of an image within an image is Caspar David Friedrich's *Woman at the Window*.

The easiest way to create an image within an image is to photograph the views seen through a window. The inclusion of windows in a photo is fascinating owing to several reasons:

- They connect two spaces that possibly have nothing to do with each other to create a whole in the photo—inner and outer space are blended into one.
- They give the illusion of three-dimensions in a two-dimensional photo; after all, photographers aim to achieve this illusion as much as possible.

However, you can use the image within an image concept more freely. For example, the frame does not always need to be rectangular. The framing can also be implied, as you will see in the photo of the power lines in Chapter 27, "Interesting Irritations." Regardless of how the frame of the perspective is composed or hinted at, it does create two pictorial planes and that's what makes this kind of composition exciting.

Generally, the wide-angle lens is the best tool to use for achieving such a composition because its strong vanishing perspective coupled with the immense depth of field makes it ideally suited for blending two spaces.



Figure 26–1



1 Upper horizontal harmonic dividing line

2 Lower horizontal harmonic dividing line

3 Vertical symmetry axis

4 Breaking the line pattern

Melancholy with Binoculars

As you have seen, melancholic moods can be poetic. The photo in figure 26–1 has four planes that create this poetry: the table with the candle, the window with the raindrops, the blurred background, and the television screen. The image within an image is taken literally here because the image of the sailboat on the television screen and the opaque window achieve the main tension in this photo. The promising virtual reality contrasts with the sobering reality. This is surely a photo that could tell a story, a story about yearning and wanderlust. (In the language of classical painting, the sailboat often symbolized yearning.) Here, the sailboat is placed in rather dull premises: The window frame looks somewhat worn and the windowpane looks steamed up from the inside and rainy from the outside. Both the television and the barely recognizable sofa beneath it do not look so modern either. Only the candle seems to break through this melancholic mood, providing a bit of relief.

The photo was taken with an analog camera using a rather large aperture of a normal lens. Table and background are blurred, but this lack of sharpness actually helps the image.

Backlight Projection

As I mentioned earlier, the frame created by perspective does not have to be rectangular. In the photo in figure 26–2, the sail of an Indian fishing boat serves as a projection screen for the image within an image. Here, the sun acts as projector for the silhouettes of the seven persons who are hoisting the sail. It was essential to shoot the photo at precisely the right moment because only a few seconds later the people moved and the composition was gone.

Because the photo was shot with an analog camera, it was very important to burn in the sky in the darkroom to intensify the framing effect. The sky that gradually becomes darker toward the top helps to lead the eye toward the bright part of the image within the image, where the action is concentrated and the distribution of light is strengthened.



Figure 26–2

It would have taken forever to create a template for every photo, therefore hand-blocking was used to shadow areas of the image where less exposure was desired. Naturally, a 100 percent clean result was never achieved because this complicated dodging act had to be performed during a certain exposure time. In this photo, the dodging is not uniform (the upper part of the sail is too dark and the left area is too bright). Such slight imperfections characterize analog photo manipulation.

This photo serves as an example of how the digital darkroom allows for more precise dodging and burning compared to the traditional darkroom. Digital dodging tools can be adjusted to all sizes, thus allowing you to take your time to gradually dodge and burn until the perfect result is achieved.

The photo was taken with a 28 mm wide-angle lens.

Ruin in Kurdistan

The photograph (figure 26–3) of a landscape illuminated by the flat light of the midday sun needed pictorial tension to be good. The mountainous terrain and the ruin divide the image into two halves, providing the necessary pictorial tension. In the left half, the eye can wander freely along the wild, barren

expanse of the eastern Turkish landscape, while the right half is dominated by the ruin—and the view through the ruin toward the barren mountains creates yet another image. This creates the pictorial tension and a lot of depth that would otherwise be practically nonexistent.



Figure 26–3

Here, it was important to intensify the contrast between sky and clouds, something easily controlled in analog photography with color filters. In this case, I used a yellow filter, although an orange or red filter would have increased the effect to the mystical realm (such a ruin is reminiscent of another age), but I didn't have one with me. If available space is an issue, the yellow filter is the universal filter for analog black and white photography. Since the release of the CS3 version of the program, Photoshop includes conversion presets for simulating a number of classic black and white filter effects. You can nearly always use the yellow filter preset to increase the contrast between clouds and sky. This photo was taken with a 28 mm wide-angle lens.

Square Concrete Blocks in the Landscape

If the image within an image in the previous photo stressed the wildness of the landscape, the photo in figure 26–4 expresses the joy of an idyllic landscape.

Two gigantic-looking squares block the view of the boundless beauty of a mountainous landscape on the volcanic island of Lanzarote, a landscape that opens up behind a flower-filled meadow. The square concrete blocks create the frame of the perspective and act like two images within the image that taper off in the central perspective and lead your eye to the center of the picture. The square block in the middle makes the landscape in the background look like it appears on a television screen.

The image triggers a feeling of uneasiness. What are these blocks for? What is going on here? Such an image might force you to think about a deeper issue: Will concrete someday cover the earth? The mood evoked in this photo may express such a general feeling of uneasiness, which certainly reflects the mood of the times.

The photo was taken with an analog camera using a 20 mm wide-angle lens. I later scanned the negative and manipulated it in Photoshop to increase the medium-tone contrast by 35%. I then used the Burn tool to expose the sky in the upper edge of the photo by about 20%.



Figure 26–4

27 Interesting Irritations

Reality is often full of things that resist being incorporated into a harmonic pictorial composition. Such things break up a photo and may be precisely what make the image interesting.

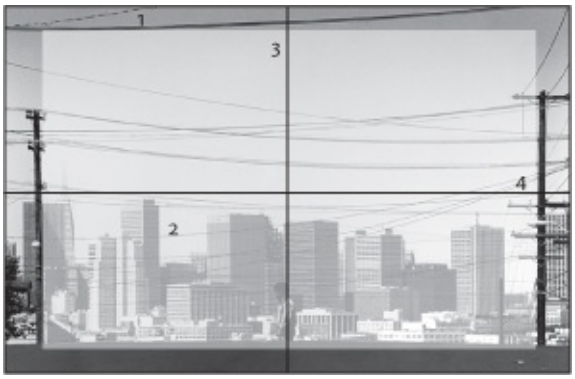
The depiction of a harmonic, magical, and unified world was one objective that the famous photographer Ansel Adams pursued in his images. The world he showed in his images had no breaks; all the pictorial elements and means of composition he applied had only one objective, to magically translate the unbroken enchantment of the landscape into a black and white photograph.

Is it still possible to photograph our world in this way? This is an almost philosophical question. Yet, one thing is certain: The world surely has more breaks now than in the times of Ansel Adams, and this makes the representation of an intact world through photography become questionable (see Chapter 7).

The inclusion of breaks in an image surely creates tension. Breaks are frequently used as optically irritating points that force your eye to move through a composition. The classically irritating elements that members of the old photo clubs encountered were the power poles and telephone lines. Photographers in such clubs often said that they almost had to take a pair of scissors so they could photograph unbroken landscapes. Nowadays, it is very easy to remove these irritating elements with Photoshop, but you don’t have to!



Figure 27–1



1 Frame

2 Backdrop

3 Symmetry axes

Power Lines in San Francisco

The photo in figure 27–1 is almost overgrown by all kinds of power and telephone lines, and yet they intensify the appeal of this urban landscape in San Francisco. The power line tangle has been purposefully included in the pictorial

composition to become an inextricable part of the image, but it was essential to at least compose the rest of the photo in an orderly fashion. Thus, I placed the telephone lines in the left and right edges of the photo so they create symmetry. I also gave the pictorial composition a stagelike appearance and a latent pictorial frame consisting of the street below, the two poles on either side, and the lines above, with the sky gradually becoming darker toward the top. The figure placed along the vertical axis of symmetry emphasizes the clear symmetrical order. By using a 200 mm telephoto lens, the skyscraper perspective is so flat that it consists entirely of vertical and horizontal lines, resembling an artificial backdrop behind the man and the tangle of cables. However, without all these lines, the photo would be only half as interesting, although at first glance they appear irritating because they seem to interfere with reality. This image demonstrates how a seemingly irritating element can be successfully integrated.

Irritating Fence

Looking at the photo in figure 27–2, you get the impression of being left out. The fence prevents access to this inviting Coney Island beach. Access is only permitted to the wealthy residents of a gated and exclusive community located right behind the fence. It would have been easier, of course, to photograph the beach through the fence opening, but then the special appeal of the image would have been lost—the viewer looks yearningly through the opening of the fence to a lovely, backlit beach while simultaneously coming to the conclusion that there is no way to slip through the narrow gap. As I have mentioned, ships and boats were used by the Old Masters in their canvases to symbolize yearning, and a ship invoking that feeling is seen moving past the locked opening. Though very small, the ship is exactly in the middle of the picture and is therefore immediately noticed. In this image characterized by a folding symmetrical composition, the horizon lies on the horizontal axis of symmetry. The sky of this photo was subsequently darkened toward the top in the darkroom giving the image a “roof,” thus intensifying the effect of sunlight.



Figure 27–2

This photo was taken with an analog camera and a 20 mm wide-angle lens.

Surreal Cemetery

One of the stylistic media of surrealism is to bring together things that, in reality, are not related to each other. What is a concrete mixer doing in a cemetery? Well, apparently cemeteries must also be expanded; nevertheless this element is an extraneous structure and therefore acts as a break. The cemetery remains intact only in the lower part of the image. The empty rows in the “third story” look unreal. The deep black conveys a strange spell. If the lower part of the image shows harmony, the upper part radiates something threatening, stressed by the blackness of the coffin openings and the sky.



Figure 27–3



Figure 27–4

Once again, I had to consciously decide whether or not to include the irritating concrete mixer in the composition.

The photo was taken with an analog Mamiya 645 and a 35 mm wide-angle lens (which corresponds approximately to 21 mm in small format), and a red filter was used to darken the sky considerably.

Mysterious Lighting Spectacle

The photo in figure 27–4, taken in the northern half of La Palma in the Canary Islands, should have shown an unbroken landscape with rising backlit clouds, but that was difficult to accomplish. To show only the trees enveloped in sun and fog would have been somewhat of a cliché, and I would have needed a longer telephoto lens than the available 210 mm telephoto (135 mm in small

format) of my Mamiya 645 medium-format camera. All I could do, then, was to incorporate the seemingly irritating stop sign into the composition. In the small photo (figure 27–5), the composition is still not perfect, but when the tree is mysteriously veiled by the clouds, the composition is indeed perfect. The veiled play of light seems almost otherworldly, so the stop sign brings the photo once again “down to earth” and, to a certain extent, attests that this light show is occurring in this world after all.

The gray values were equalized by such extremely precise partial exposures in the darkroom that they reproduce exactly the right mood.



Figure 27–5

28 The Play of Forms—Conscious Repetition of Pictorial Shapes

During the course of this book, you have seen that there are parallels between pictorial and musical languages. Pictures can have the same rhythm as musical pieces; images can be composed in such a way that they have a leitmotif (i. e., recurring theme) that is repeated in a modified way. Many classical musical pieces have a basic leitmotif that is repeated throughout the composition, albeit in slightly varied forms.

You have already seen that most of the time, a photo is successful when its basic pictorial structure—from the purely abstract viewpoint when it is fully separated from the subject of the image—is also interesting to look at.

The first step should be to recognize and analyze these pictorial patterns in photos that have already been taken. The second step should be to identify the abstract patterns that underlie reality when you're actively taking photos; in other words, to think abstractly and pictorially when looking at the real world. This is especially hard when you are trying to shoot content-related subjects whose composition is already demanding full attention. Even more difficult is to apply this kind of pictorial approach in street photography, for example, in the hustle and bustle of an urban setting, where everything is in flux and the abstract pattern of an image is constantly changing. If you also use a wide-angle lens, it becomes especially challenging to keep all edges of the picture simultaneously in sight while making sure to control form as well as content. Of all photographers, Cartier-Bresson was probably the one who mastered this challenge the best, because his news photos have not only interesting content, but also outstanding abstract patterns.



Figure 28–1

To approach the many varied abstract forms with the camera, it is easiest to identify only two similar patterns in totally different objects that will later develop a certain relationship in the image. This kind of practice trains the eye to find abstract shapes in objects and is suitable for creating exciting images out of rather banal landscapes or objects, as the following three examples will show.

What makes photography so exciting is that it brings together and blends two spaces that, in reality, are far away from each other and are often unrelated on the two-dimensional print. Thus, with regard to content, elements may be formally linked that actually have little or nothing to do with each other.

View from Schauinsland Mountain

The mountainous region of Germany, although refreshing and pretty, is difficult to shoot in real life because it frequently ends up looking very conventional in photographs. After all, the identical spruce plantations seen in the Harz and Black Forests do not look particularly photogenic. Another problem is that the three-dimensional view inspires enthusiasm, but this depth is almost impossible to capture on a flat surface. And yet, this two-dimensional pictorial space begs to be composed. In this case (figure 28–1), the landscape by itself would not have been enough for creating an interesting photo, but the two projecting corners of the observation tower do provide the much-needed pictorial tension. The corners are just as angular as the upper lines formed by the mountain crest. Similar lines having a similar angle are therefore repeated. The railing breaks up the quiet harmony of the landscape, and the soft shapes of the clouds contrast greatly with the pointed forms of the foreground. The photo was taken using a 24 mm wide-angle lens.

Umbrella and Sky

The photo in figure 28–2 taken on the tranquil Mediterranean, would have looked too calm by itself, so it was essential to include an element that would slightly disturb the calmness. The cropped umbrella was the ideal candidate for inclusion because its triangular shape resembles the triangle formed by the clouds in the sky. Both fleecy clouds give the image the symmetry it needs and lead your eye to the center of the image, which looks a bit surreal. The upper end of the umbrella looks quite abstract at first and is only recognized as such after a second glance, triggering the idea of unbroken nature. What is going on behind us? Is the area teeming with tourists? All this is left to the imagination of the viewer. The photo was taken with an analog camera using a 20 mm wide-angle lens. I used an orange filter to increase the contrast between sky and clouds.



Figure 28–2

Reflection in the Sky

At first glance, a cornfield does not usually trigger the impulse to photograph it. However, the single plant backlit by the sky, and the two abstract shapes that resemble each other, can create a rather exciting photo (figure 28–3). The form of the plant is reflected in the sky, albeit mirror inverted. The photo uses the plant's leaf as the axis of symmetry, and both leaves are reflected in the sky. The composition is very dynamic, last but not least, due to the rising slant and the leaf's sweep that extends into the sky.



Figure 28–3

The image owes its dynamic quality to the view provided by a 24 mm wide-angle lens. The contrast was intensified by the use of an orange filter placed before the analog camera and a slight burning in of the sky in the darkroom. This photo proves that an ordinary scene found just around the corner in this boring field can lead to unusual ways of seeing.

Water Lilies without Cliché

Clichéd photos of water lilies are very often used for illustrating rather shallow texts. Thus, the challenge here was to photograph these plants so the photo would not look clichéd. (Sunsets and sunrises present a similarly difficult challenge: pretty to look at, but most of the time degraded to a cliché on print.) When taking plant photos, however, backlight can come to the rescue, as was the case in the photo in figure 28–4. However, for this photo it was not enough because without the sun's reflection, the image would have looked boring.

The photo was minimally composed. The composition comes from three pictorial shapes that vary slightly from each other: a larger oval formed by the water lilies in the center, a smaller one to the far left, and the semicircular sun reflection. Without this reflection, the photo would have been boring; it is the decisive final touch that gives the image a mysterious, almost mystical effect—and it changes the shape of the oval into a semicircle. Furthermore, four jagged edges have been "built-in" to the sun's reflection, and the longest one points toward the middle oval formed by the water lilies. The backlight makes the pond's surroundings and the trees appear dark and barely recognizable; only a branch is clearly recognizable in the upper-left corner. The photo works due to the extreme contrast of the water lilies, the sun's reflection, and the dark background.

The photo was taken with an analog camera at an 80 mm focal length.

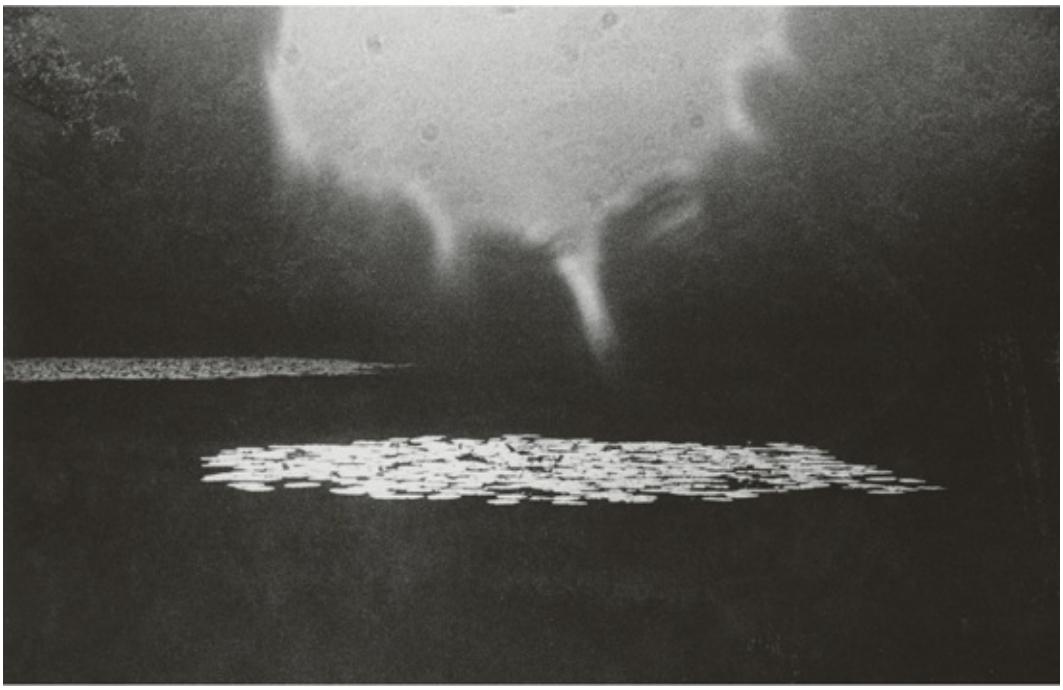


Figure 28–4

29 How to Compose with Blurred Movement

Long exposures play an increasingly prominent role in today's modern artistic photography. A photographer who has used long exposures to the max is Michael Wesely. His yearlong exposures of Berlin's Potsdam Square have been exhibited internationally. Only wall fragments remained stable in his photos, everything else looks dynamic and chaotic, almost resembling a futurist painting of the early twentieth century.

It's fascinating how photography is capable of breaking through our conventional perception by blurring what we experience as individual, clearly separated moments that are strung together. In Wesely's images, these moments just dissolve into a blurred flow from which countless instants of an entire year become one single complete view.

In another series that can be seen as further development of his extremely long exposures, Wesely does not leave his camera on the same spot but begins twisting it horizontally during exposure. The results are unfocused landscape photos in which the horizontal axis is completely blurred, thus becoming a fuzzy interaction of multicolored stripes in which details are no longer recognizable, reminding the viewer of Mark Rothko's paintings. These photos can also be regarded as allusions to the stripes seen on the bar code stickers found on all kinds of merchandise.

In contrast to long exposures, world-famous photojournalist Henri Cartier-Bresson formulated the "decisive moment" style of photography by waiting until the fraction of a second that makes the right statement; what has been dormant suddenly breaks out and gets to the heart of things.

With long exposures, on the other hand, this moment blurs, allowing time to flow and mix. Naturally, these long exposures make you think philosophically about the nature of time. What is it? How can it be grasped? How can time, as a basis of photography, be played with? Almost every photographer has tried to answer these questions.

Long exposures are as old as the beginnings of photography; when the rather insensitive emulsions finally gave way to short exposures, it revolutionized the medium. Currently, we can freely choose between $\frac{1}{8000}$ s and long exposures that last entire evenings or over one year, as with Wesely. Technically speaking, long exposures are no longer a problem; even good digital cameras allow you to go

beyond the 30-second exposure and shoot with a B (long exposure) setting. The indispensable tool for shooting good-quality, long exposures is a stable tripod that is strong enough to withstand a heavy telephoto lens (added weight), a vertical format (less stability), and wind. The tripod should weigh at least 5 pounds, and you should preferably stay away from very lightweight ones made of plastic. It is better to purchase a stable tripod even if height concessions must be made due to weight issues. A shooting height of 51 inches is enough for almost all subjects.

Exposure is no longer particularly difficult either: If you use black and white negative film, I generally recommend slightly overexposing by one to two apertures when shooting at night because exposure meters are easily fooled by neon lights and thus indicate a higher light intensity than is really available.

Handling the exposure using a digital camera is even less of a problem because you can control the image perfectly with the histogram on the display. If necessary, you can correct the image by reshooting it.

Chapel in a Sea of Grass

In the photo in figure 29–1, the entire foreground is immersed in blurred movement while the chapel in the middle of the image remains perfectly sharp. The photo was taken from the window of a moving train while traveling between Hanover and Brunswick. The shutter speed was $\frac{1}{30}$ s; long enough for making the field in the foreground appear out of focus, yet short enough for the houses, trees, and the chapel on the horizon to be in perfect focus.

The photo suggests that the chapel is in the middle of the sea and not behind ordinary fields. To intensify the magical impression of this photo (taken with an analog camera), I strongly burned in the sky toward the top in the darkroom. Thus, the surroundings of the chapel are flooded with light and an impression of spatial depth is thereby created. All pictorial means have been used to give this small, rather inconspicuous chapel a special charm, and the blurred movement is the main reason for this.



Figure 29–1

Typical Night Photo

When taking a photo of the Paris Opera House (figure 29–2), I closed the aperture so much that the automatic counter of my exposure meter exceeded 30 seconds—enough time for coincidence, my “companion,” to create a composition. In the finished photo, a passing bus going into a side street produced an interesting composition that broke the central perspective fixed on the Opera House. The two elements that make the composition especially interesting are the lettering that is reflected in the windows of the bus and the bright line that goes across from the top to the right edge of the image. However, all other lines created by the long exposure also give the photo a dynamic quality that very clearly expresses metropolitan effervescence: a typical, classic night photo.

One more thing: When shooting long exposures, you must be aware of the reciprocity effect that occurs when aperture changes are no longer proportional to exposure time (i. e., you cannot compensate for a very long exposure by changing the aperture). However, in practice this effect plays a much lesser role than photo clubs often attribute to it. The photo was taken with an analog camera using a 105 mm focal length.



Figure 29–2

Long Exposure with Displacement

I took the photo of the World Trade Center (figure 29–3) in June 2001, not even three months before the tragedy that took place on September 11. Seen in retrospect, it has an almost anticipatory character, although I only intended to use it as a long exposure experiment. The camera was mounted on a tripod and set to a very small aperture (f/16) and an exposure time of 20 seconds, during which time I displaced the camera vertically. The pictorial effect is disturbing, especially when we remember that three months later the main subject of this photo became the victim of the most brutal terrorist attack ever.

Needless to say, this long exposure would one day have a significance that could not have been foreseen at the time the photo was taken. The effect of this vertical displacement implies, in fact, the disintegration of the solid structure. The elongated lights do give the impression of a fire, and the vertical lines emphasize this impression of collapsing stability.



Figure 29–3



Figure 29–4

Blurred Movement in the Daytime

Long exposures can also be achieved in the daytime. One method is to use a neutral density (gray) filter to lengthen exposure time significantly. If there is no such filter at hand, another possibility is to use a low ASA number and shoot

with the smallest possible aperture to reach shutter speeds of ⅛ or ¼ s.

You can see the result of a long exposure in this composition based on architectural lines that are, by themselves, not very exciting, but the blurred face at lower-left creates tension. In a lively city such as Frankfurt, with patience and some luck, you will see a person walk by in the right position. Naturally, you must be a keen observer of the surroundings to know exactly when to release the shutter. Another possibility would be to take a friend and tell him or her when to start moving in front of the camera.

For these kinds of photos, digital cameras are ideal because the result can be seen at once and you can repeatedly shoot the photo until the image is satisfactory. In this case, triple pictorial tension was created among modern man, late nineteenth century architecture, and Frankfurt's Main Tower reflected in a modern glass façade.

This photo was taken digitally using a standard lens. I used the Photoshop Shadow/Highlight tool to brighten the shadows by about 12%.

Playing with Motion Blur

There has recently been an increase in the number of photos that are shot deliberately blurred. This often has the appearance of being a cheap effect as it doesn't take much skill to simply wave your camera about during nighttime exposures. If you want to use blur as a compositional tool, you should use it carefully and in a considered fashion. In the photo in figure 29–5, I used a neutral density filter to artificially increase the length of my daytime shutter speed. I moved the camera during the 10-second exposure to create a blurred repetition of the outlines of the church towers. This produced a photo with a strong graphical feel that is reminiscent of the style of Lyonel Feininger.

The photo was taken using a 200 mm telephoto lens and was converted to black and white using Photoshop. Contrast was significantly increased.



Figure 29–5

Section 4 The Digital Darkroom



30 Black and White from Color

Every serious photographer knows that in analog photography at least half of the pictorial effect is achieved in the darkroom by dedicated laboratory work. With regard to the possibilities of subsequent image manipulation, can digital photography compete against analog photography in the realm of black and white?

The answer is an emphatic Yes! because one thing is certain: Modern digital cameras have outstanding pictorial quality. And armed with Photoshop, you have subsequent manipulation techniques of high quality at hand; Ansel Adams would have been envious.

The only slight disadvantage to digital black and white is that the high-quality, traditional fiber-based paper is unavailable for the digital process. Although a few laboratories do print digital black and white on fiber-based paper, it may be expensive. Enlargers that can print digital images on fiber-based paper can cost about as much as a medium-priced car. Therefore, the average, not-so-wealthy user is largely restricted to the use of inkjet printers for do-it-yourself printing. Naturally, good professional labs can also process neutral black and white lambda prints on color photographic paper, but they aren't very economical either, and they certainly do not use fiber-based papers. Paper manufacturers now produce fiber-based papers for use with inkjet printers. Although the surface of such papers still has a very different feel from that of traditional baryta or fiber-based material, papers such as Hahnemühle Baryta offer fine tonal differentiation that is directly comparable with that of analog baryta prints.

In spite of this slight difference in the quality of the end product, this introduction is not a plea for analog photography. The almost endless processing options offered by Photoshop mean that it is now possible to produce better results from digital originals than was ever possible using analog material.

The following chapters deal with numerous manipulation techniques that Photoshop offers for achieving the best possible digital print results, but they nevertheless focus on the truly important techniques, explaining them in the clearest terms possible.

The requirement for you to use the techniques are as follows: Photos must be taken in color mode, either in JPEG format or preferably converted from RAW

format to a TIFF or PSD file with the RAW converter. Even if, in my opinion, the JPEG format is not as bad as is sometimes claimed, the RAW mode is certainly better because it gives images a 12-bit to 16-bit color depth instead of the 8 bits in JPEG. These 8 bits correspond to a tone value range of 255 tones, perceived by the eye as a constant gradient. The 16 bits, on the other hand, encompass 65,536 tones, which sounds like a lot, but the differences are barely noticeable to the eye. After a brief optimization, a photo taken in RAW format should be converted to an uncompressed TIFF or PSD file in the opened RAW window to manipulate it with Photoshop's extensive range of tools.

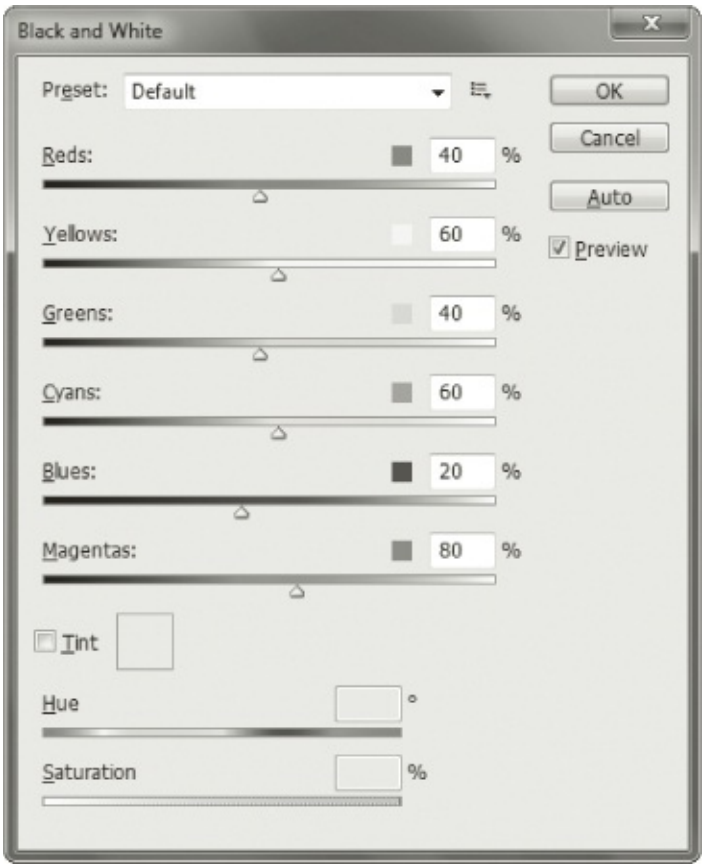


Figure 30–1

Conversion from Color to Black and White

The Photoshop CS3 release introduced the Black & White command into the Image > Adjustments menu. This is an important new tool that makes it much simpler to produce effective black and white images from color originals. The

tool’s interface provides adjustment sliders for red, yellow, green, cyan, blue, and magenta channels, with which you can fine-tune your gray tones much more selectively than was possible using the earlier Channel Mixer tool. For example, users who were not sure how to mix yellow using the Channel Mixer’s RGB channels now have a dedicated Yellows slider to play with.

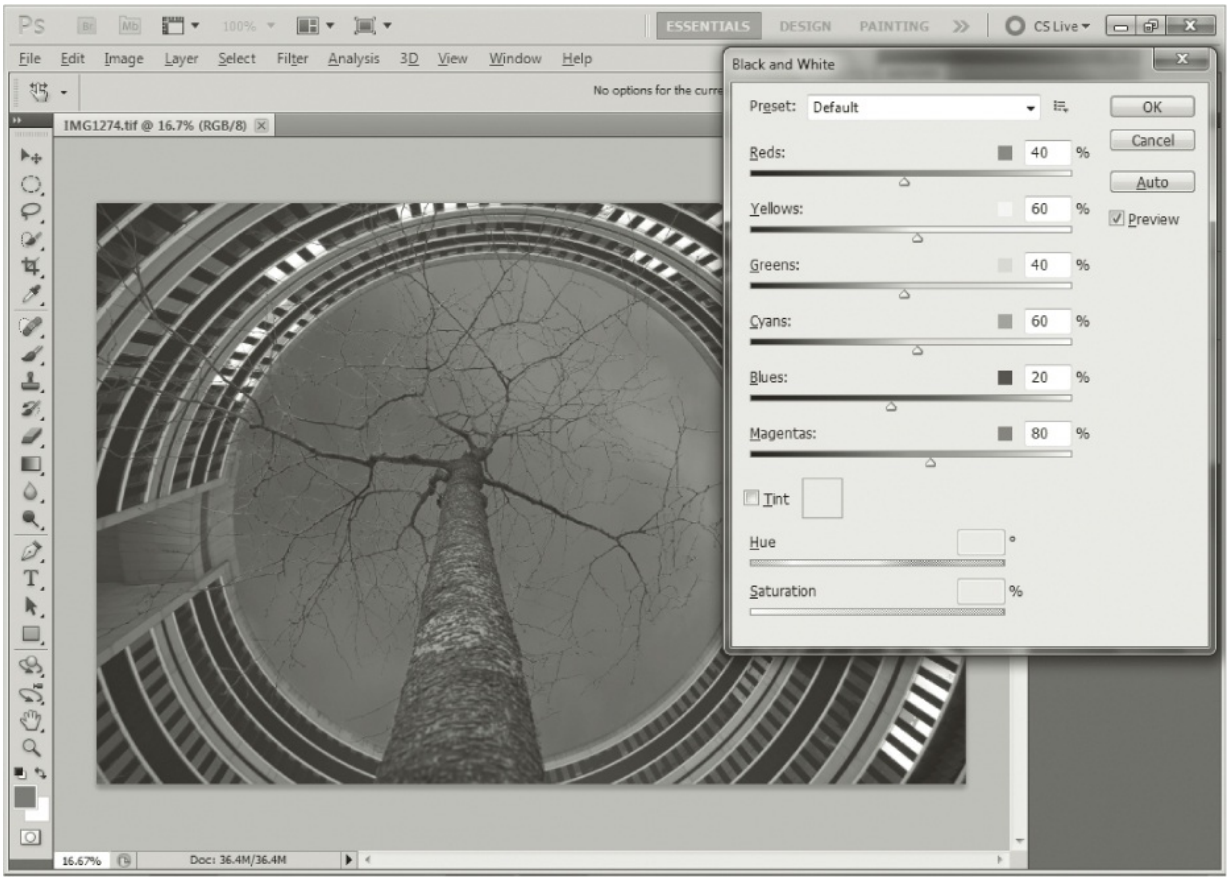


Figure 30–2

The default settings in the Black & White dialog are 40% red, 60% yellow, 40% green, 60% cyan, 20% blue, and 80% magenta (figure 30–1).

Let’s use an example to see how the tool works: The photo in figure 30–2 of the Omega building in Offenbach, Germany, leaves the contrast between the tree and the sky looking weak if we convert it using the default settings.

Simulating Analog Filter Effects

This is where the Black & White tool’s filter presets and sliders come into play. They allow us to determine precisely which tones we want to darken or brighten

and enable us to simulate traditional yellow, red, and blue analog filters.

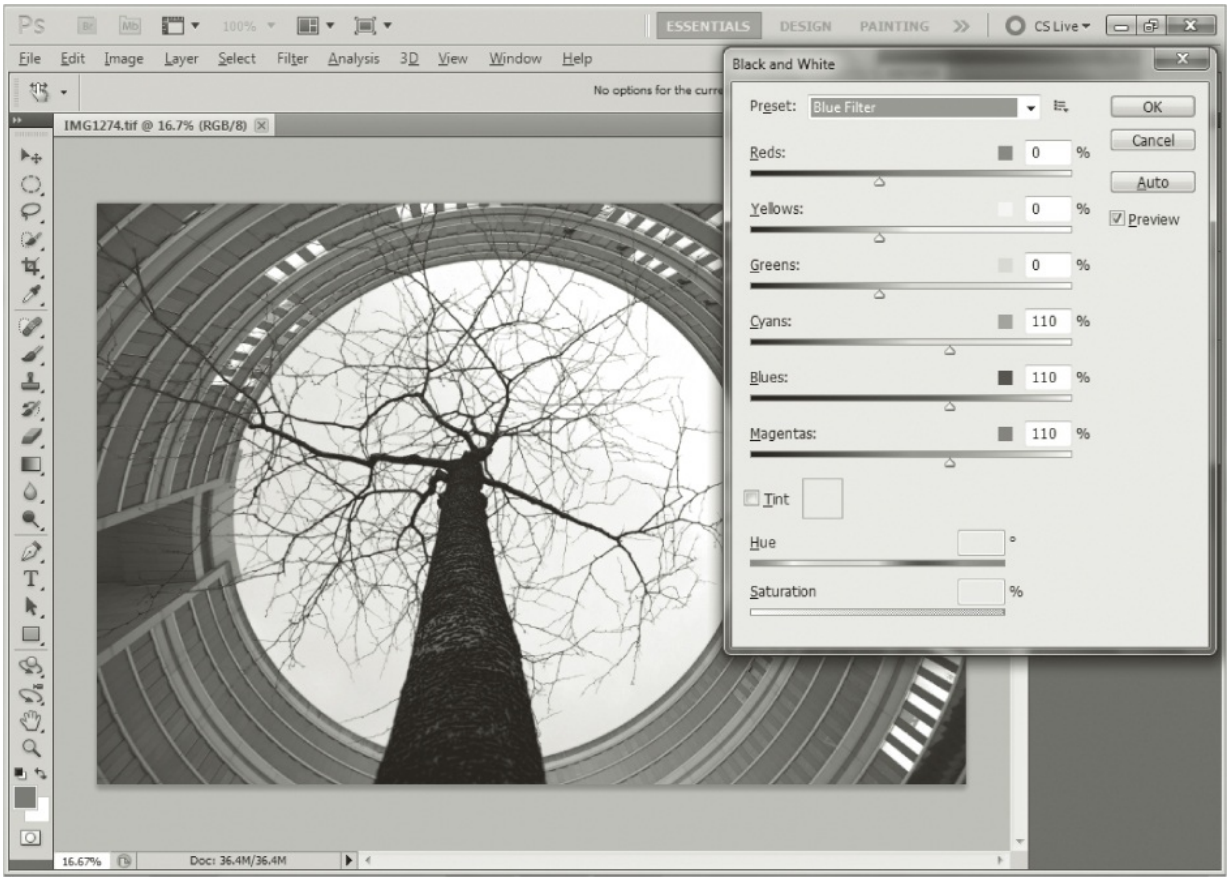


Figure 30–3

Figure 30–3 shows the effect of the Blue Filter preset on our sample image. In this case, Reds, Yellows and Greens values are reduced to zero, while the Cyans, Blues, and Magentas values are pushed up to 110%.

The result is a completely different monochrome image in which the simulated blue filter significantly brightens the blue tones in the sky. This increases the contrast between the tree and the sky, but reduces contrast within the building itself.

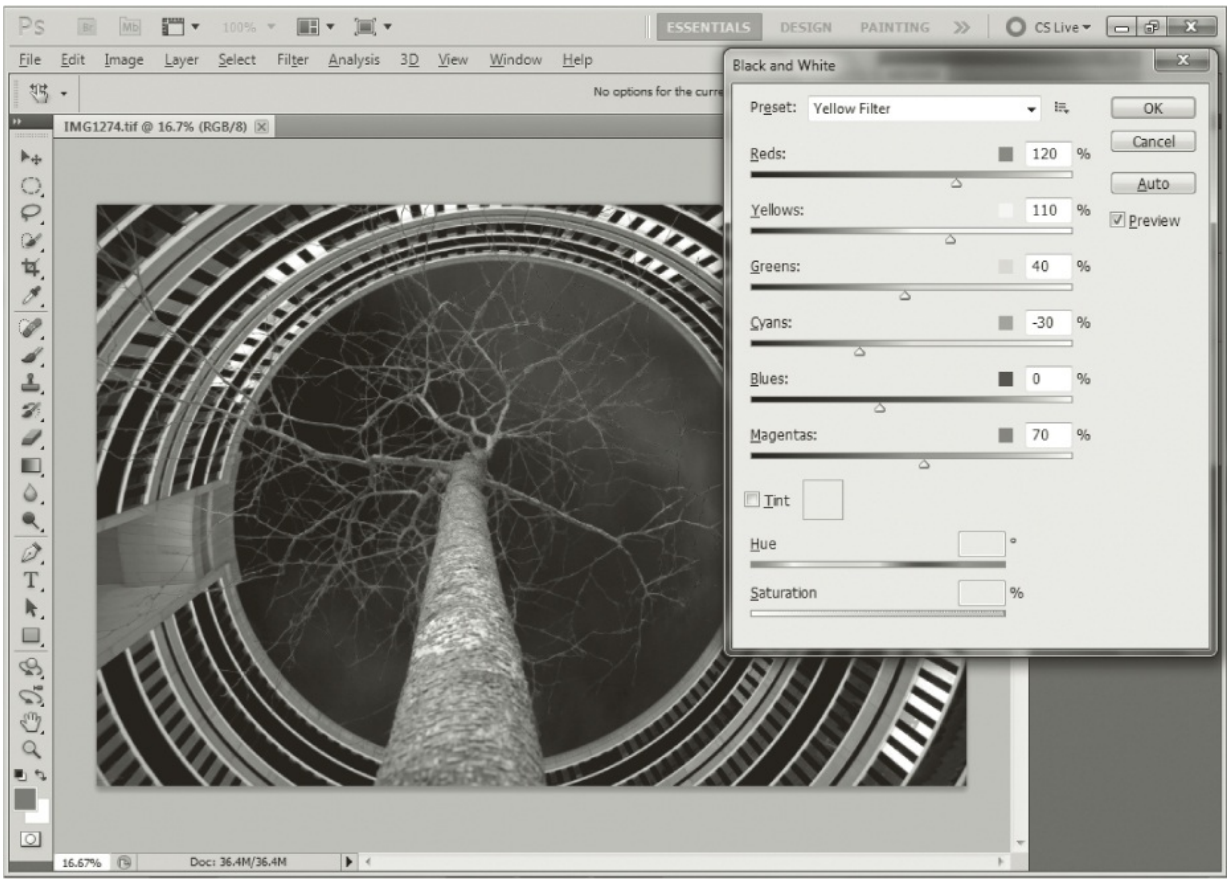


Figure 30–4

Figure 30–4 shows the result of using the Yellow Filter preset during conversion. Here, the Reds value was increased to 120%, Yellows to 110%, Greens to 40%, Cyans was reduced to −30%, Blues to zero, and Magentas are set to 70%. Once again, the result is a very different looking image, with the complementary colors of the yellow tones appearing much darker. The violet sky and the similar-colored cladding of the building appear almost black. The tree, which is illuminated by orange artificial light, appears much brighter than in the previous version. These effects work in exactly the same way as analog filters, which produce brighter grayscale values for tones similar to the color of the filter itself.

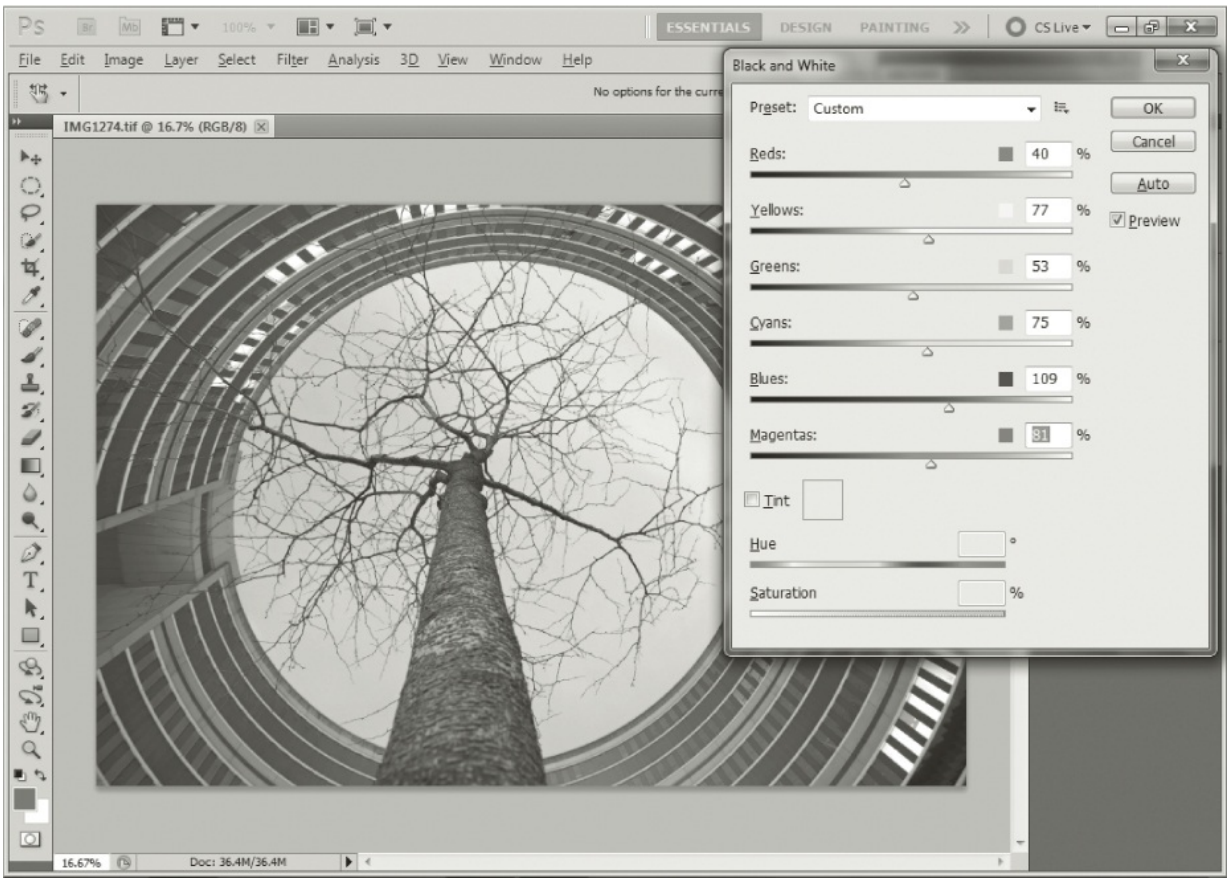


Figure 30–5

Personally, I find the Photoshop filter presets slightly over the top, but you can always counterbalance their effects by adjusting the color sliders individually until you find the right levels for your particular image.

My favorite combination for this image involves setting Reds to 40%, Yellows to 77%, Greens to 53%, Cyans to 75%, Blues to 109%, and Magentas to 81% (figure 30–5). This makes the contrast between tree and sky similar to that produced by the Blue Filter settings but gives the tonal values within the building more contrast while preserving detail in the tree. The result is shown in figure 30–6.



Figure 30–6

There is no orange filter preset available, although there are Green Filter, Blue Filter, High Contrast Red Filter, and Infrared options (see also the section on infrared photography in chapter 3).

Try out all of the available presets and select the one you like best, or simply tweak the color channels individually until you get a result that you like.

If you click on the image preview while the Black & White dialog is open, the eyedropper tool detects the tone where the cursor is located and allows you to increase or decrease the appropriate slider's setting by moving the mouse left or right while keeping the mouse button pressed. For example, clicking on the sky in our sample image selects the Blues slider, and all blue tones are then darkened if you move the mouse to the left. Moving the mouse to the right has the opposite effect and brightens the blue channel.

It is also possible to tint entire images during conversion. To do this, simply select the Tint option once you have made your slider settings. You can then use the Hue and Saturation sliders located below the Tint check box to adjust the tint to your liking. The default tint is a light sepia color.

Adjusting the Effects of Filter Presets

The autumnal scene in figure 30–7 was shot using a polarizer filter and causes problems if we convert it to black and white using one of the Photoshop presets. The default conversion values give the image a lifeless look and the bright yellow leaves simply don't look right. Using the Yellow Filter preset (figure 30–

8) gives the resulting image an exaggerated look. The yellow tones at top right are almost burned out and the sky is much too dark. The Red Filter preset effect is even more excessive and the Infrared preset turns the image into a blurred, overexposed mess that has very little to do with the look of a genuine infrared photograph (figure 30–9).



Figure 30–7



Figure 30–8



Figure 30–9

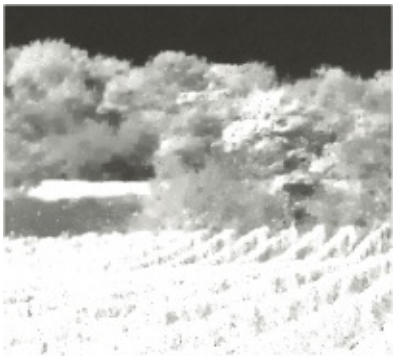


Figure 30–10

A magnified detail of the infrared version of the image (figure 30–10) shows that the excessive yellow channel value has eliminated nearly all detail in the yellow tones. This demonstrates one of the Black & White tool's shortcomings in that yellow, red, and green settings of 110% and more cause a significant loss of detail, especially for yellow tones. Fortunately, the tool allows you to adjust all six color channels individually for each preset too, making it a simple task to dial in your own custom values that preserve detail in the areas of the image that are most important to you.

The best way to achieve an individual look is to use the Custom preset option (figure 30–11). For this version of our image, the Yellows value was moderately raised from 60% to 110% and Greens from 40% to 100%. Blues are reduced from 20% to −35%. Here, the bright yellow tones from the original image remain bright without burning out or blurring, and the sky retains its dramatic contrast to the rest of the image.

The Photoshop filter presets don't represent a 100 percent correlation with their equivalent analog filter effects, but the ability to fine-tune the individual

color channels gives the photographer the necessary freedom to produce excellent monochrome conversions from color originals.



Figure 30–11



Figure 30–12

The Black & White default conversion values allowed quick conversion from a color photo to a black and white image (figure 30–12). Naturally, you should not save this processed photo in the same folder with the same name because if you do so, the converted black and white image file will replace the original color file. Because there is no second layer with this method, the newly obtained black and white image must be saved either in another folder or in the same one but under a different name. In this procedure, the original color photo is saved as an unmanipulated TIFF file, while the new black and white photo is saved as another version with another name. I believe that it's not a good idea to rely solely on saving the RAW file because every camera manufacturer still works with its own proprietary RAW converter, and I fully expect JPEG and TIFF, and probably PSD files too, to be around for the next 10 to 20 years. The

question of how RAW files will develop remains open in these fast-moving times. To be on the safe side, I therefore recommend saving a TIFF version of your most important images in addition to the RAW file.

In very rare cases, a black and white photo converted from color looks good and will not need any further manipulation, as is the case here. However, most of the time the black and white photo lacks contrast and even the subject of the photo could look better with a bit more contrast. It is very easy to create more contrast:

1. On the toolbar, select Image.
2. Select Adjustments.
3. Click Brightness/Contrast.
4. This tool works with two simple sliders. Move the sliders to the right to make it steeper, or to the left to make it flatter.

If you move the contrast by 17 points to the plus sign, as in our example, the photo will look good (figure 30–13). The bright areas retain their texture and the dark shadow areas don't become pitch-black. The tendency of earlier versions of Photoshop to swamp blacks and burn out highlights is not really an issue in more recent versions of the program, making it a quick and reliable tool for making Levels adjustments. This photo was taken with a 19 mm lens.



Figure 30–13

Reflection of Fire Escapes

The example in this section demonstrates the difficulties that arise when contrast is increased and how you can work around them. Reflections on window-panes

always look somewhat flat. Digital photography is superior to its analog counterpart for dealing with reflections because the former allows you to increase contrast, as you have already seen.



Figure 30–14

The digital photo (figure 30–14) was converted to black and white using the Photoshop yellow filter preset. The resulting black and white photo, however, looks too flat—and this should not be a surprise because it's a common problem, as explained earlier. This example also illustrates a mistake often made by amateurs when manipulating contrast: The image's strength comes from the interplay of the fire escape pattern structure and the clouds. However, if you increase the contrast with the Brightness/Contrast tool as you did with the first photo, the clouds become too bright and detail can get lost (figure 30–15). In my opinion, this is the most common digital problem because such burned-out highlights immediately reveal the digital origin of the photo: In a backlit sky such as this one, the bright areas very easily lose their detail. To help counteract this effect, monitor the indicator that shows the burning out of the highlights with black or red blinking lights; this indicator is provided in almost all digital cameras. You should always make sure that this information is indicated when taking backlit photos because this burning out can be prevented either by placing a gradient filter in front of the lens to gradually darken the sky toward the top (as explained in earlier chapters), and/or by decreasing the exposure until the blinking in the display disappears. After the highlights in the photo are burned out, not even the best image manipulation programs will bring them back. On the other hand, you can more easily compensate for an underexposure, especially in RAW images.



Figure 30–15

This photo was also underexposed by just one f-stop, so the lights would show all different gradations: It demonstrates how you should naturally retain these gradations in the lights even as you increase contrast. To accomplish this contrast, apply the Adjust Levels tool in the image histogram first rather than using the easy gradation curve of Brightness/Contrast. If you click Image > Adjustments > Levels, a window with the histogram will appear (figure 30–16). The histogram shows the proportions of the various tone values in the image with a diagram: the dark areas on the left, the bright areas on the right, and the middle tones in the center. With three arrows, the dark, bright, and middle tones can be corrected with the help of this diagram. Because this photo was a bit underexposed, the tonal value curve in the highlights is not entirely to the right and you can now move the right white arrow to the edge of the tonal value curve without losing the details in the bright areas. As a countermove, you can move the middle tone arrow a little to the right to significantly increase contrast in the clouds without burning out the highlights.

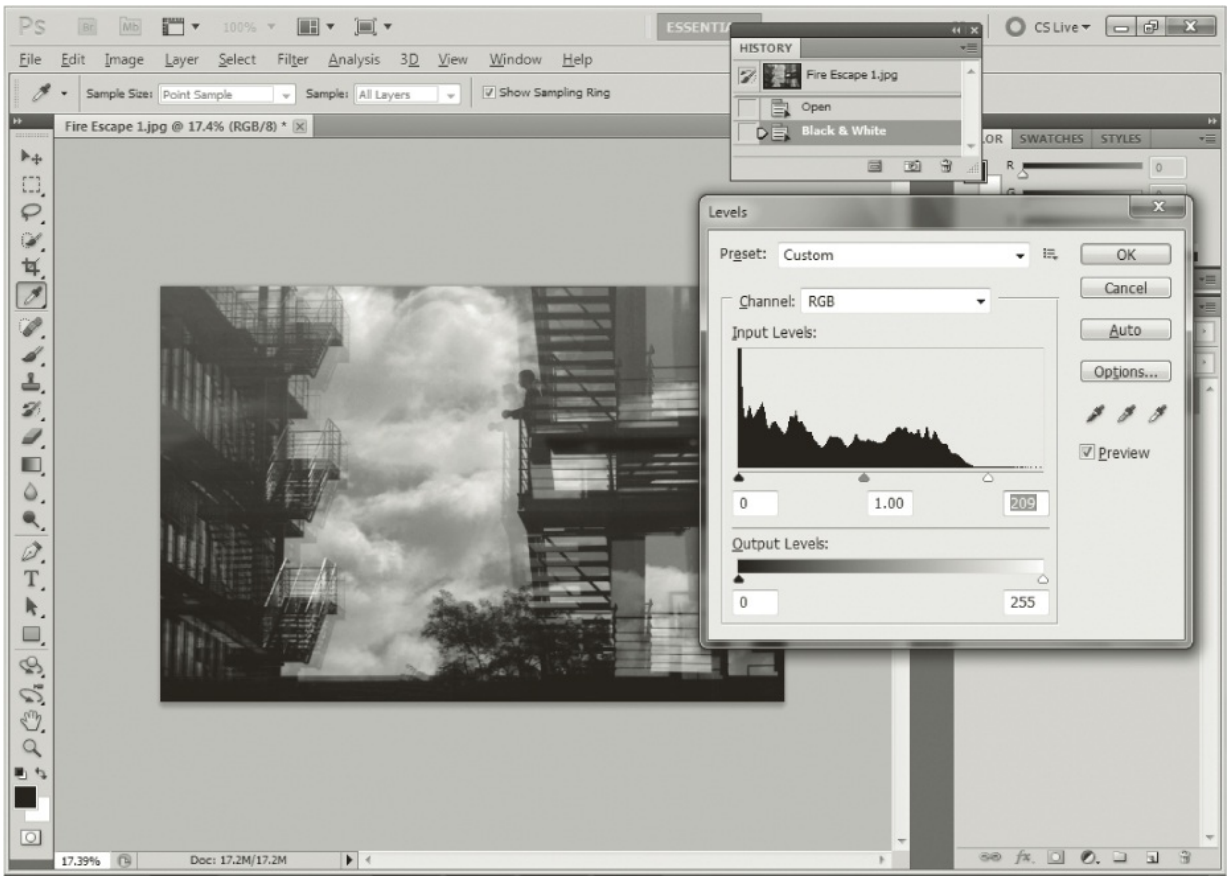


Figure 30–16

The resulting photo looks much more pleasing (figure 30–17), but the shadow areas in the left side of the picture lack texture and resemble an ink blot, to put it bluntly.



Figure 30–17

Note: *In addition to the histogram correction, you can also directly adjust the gradation curve by clicking Image > Adjustments. You can move the initially linear gradation curve to any spot to correct tonal values smoothly or strongly in every region. However, you should be very careful when moving the gradation curve because lights can burn out or shadow areas can become ink blots.*

Brightening Dark Areas while Increasing Midtone Contrast

The Shadows/Highlights tool, found by clicking Image > Adjustments, allows you to brighten shadow areas rather easily without affecting light and medium tones in the process. (You will later learn how to process individual areas such as those that have become too dark.) Conversely, you can also darken lights without influencing midtones and shadows, but you should adjust this by no more than 25%, or your photo will start looking a little unnatural. After all, everything is the result of a calculation. At first, it’s confusing that upon opening the tool the shadows are automatically reduced by 50%. To work successfully with this tool, move the shadow slider back to 0. Now you can start brightening up the shadows very carefully. In the example, the use of this tool plus a slight shadow increase of approximately 10% improves the photo. The left building now has a lot more detail and the windows reflect the clouds brightly and clearly.

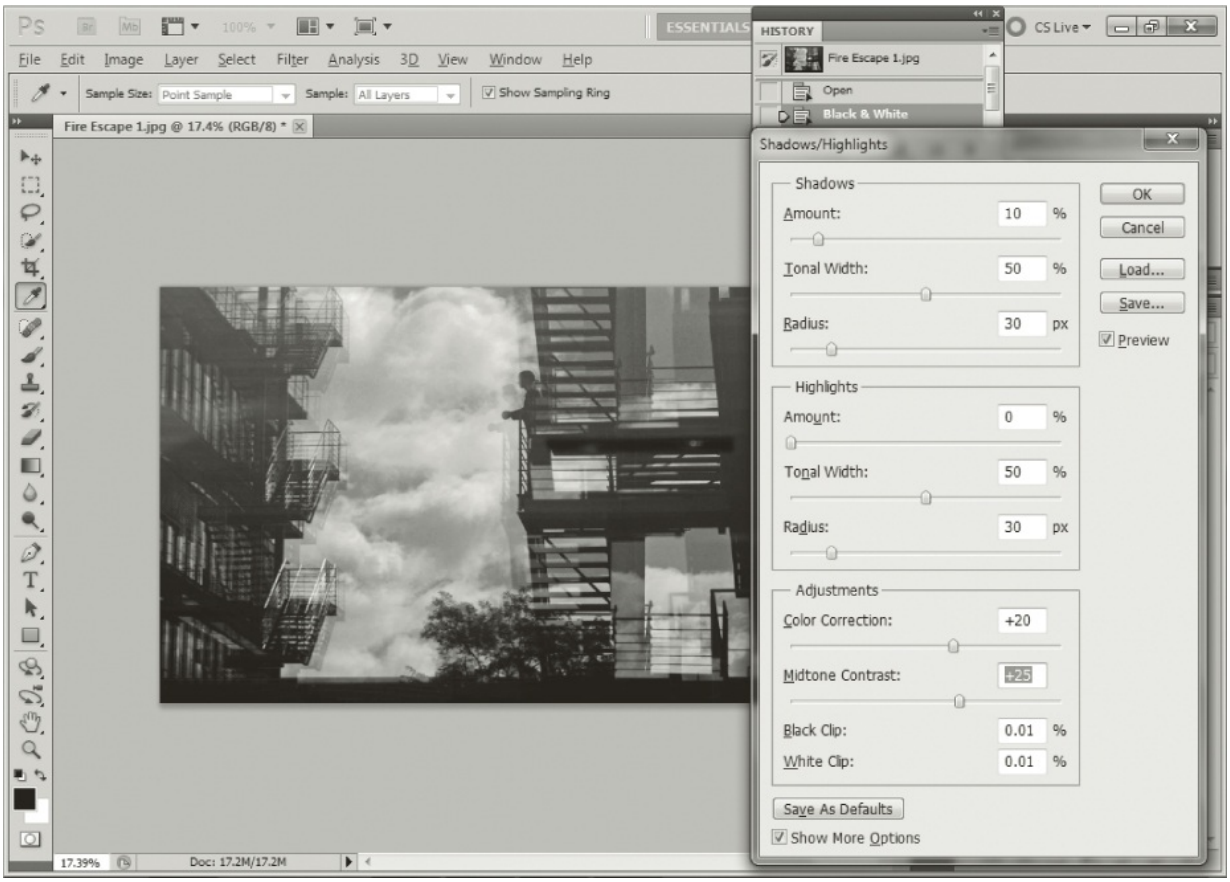


Figure 30–18

To give the photo a finishing touch, you can increase midtone contrast by 24% (figure 30–18). The midtone contrast option appears when you click Show More Options. This option is one of a number of alternatives to the Shadow/Highlight tool, because it does not allow highlights to burn out or shadows to become ink blots. If you now compare this image (figure 30–19) with the black and white converted version, you can see how the photo (figure 30–14) was improved by using this very simple method: You increased contrast without burning out the highlights while you retained shadow detail.



Figure 30–19

Adding Grain

In the past, digital photography was often criticized for producing photos that were recognizable as digital images and that looked artificial. In the early days of digital photography, this artificiality was frequently the result of somewhat unnatural colors, but the colors of photos shot in the RAW format are now so natural that this critique has lost its punch. Let’s not forget, however, that digital photography relies on pixels saved in RGB mode, and they are indeed completely different from the grain in a film emulsion.

In my opinion, the aim of digital photography is to reproduce the analog pictorial impression as closely as possible. For this reason, many black and white professional photographers add grain to their photos. This is, of course, not a “must” but a “can,” and it depends exclusively on personal taste. The calculated film grain can be varied according to size and structure. It’s very simple to add grain: In the toolbar, click Filter > Texture, and then select the subcategory Grain. To achieve a resemblance to an analog photo in a larger print, I recommend using an intensity setting of between 12 and 14. Intensity describes grain size and therefore corresponds roughly to the grain of a 100 ASA film. Contrast should be about 50% and the grain type should ideally be uniform. I can guardedly recommend using the Soft setting in the Grain Type drop-down, as well; all other options will look rather unnatural. After you confirm the grain by clicking OK, there’s something you should keep in mind: Grain is already

added to the digital image when the photo is converted to black and white from color. Therefore, for a black and white photo, it is indispensable to click Grain, Image, Adjust, and use Reduce Saturation to take the color out of the picture once again. Finally, the photo has been quickly manipulated almost to perfection and will look good in a large-sized Lambda or ink jet print.

Saving Your Images

Generally, a TIFF file is a noncompressed file that contains all information taken by the camera. A PSD file is the Photoshop equivalent of a TIFF file and requires about half as much disk space. A JPEG file, on the other hand, compresses information in a very clever way, but is unable to preserve individual layers the way that TIFF or PSD files can. As already mentioned, you should always shoot in RAW format, never in JPEG format. When converting from RAW format, the loss of quality in a JPEG file compared to a TIFF file is very low, however, and therefore this loss cannot really be recognized in enlargements of 8.3″ × 11.7″ and smaller. Nevertheless, if you think that one day you would like to have your photo printed much larger, it's better to save the images as TIFF or PSD files. Another disadvantage of a JPEG file is that it recompresses the image every time you open and modify it. If, against my advice, you have photographed only in JPEG format, you should by all means retain one JPEG image in its original state and finish the black and white conversion in one single step whenever possible to retain maximum JPEG quality. Another possibility would be to convert the JPEG photo into a TIFF or PSD file and then save the latter to a hard disk.

As already mentioned, a color photo lacking a second layer that is converted to black and white must either be saved in a new folder or given another name to retain the original color photo in the same folder. To rename and save a photo, do the following:

1. Click File > Save As. The last file used will open.
2. Give the manipulated black and white photo a new, unique name in the File Name field.
3. Select TIFF or Photoshop (PSD, PDD) format and click Save.
4. If you choose to save a file as a JPEG, a small Options window will appear after you click Save. The image file size is displayed on the right side of the window below the preview checkbox. Under Image Options, move the slider all the way to the right to select a large file size. If you want to email

the photo, move the slider to the left to reduce the file size. On the left edge of the scale, the image can still be displayed reasonably well on the screen, but keep in mind that a 7″ × 9.5″ print is not capable of withstanding such resolution.

5. Once you have selected your file size, click OK.

The black and white photo is saved as a second version without losing the original color image.

31 Partial Manipulation with the Lasso Tool

Photoshop is an endlessly complex image manipulation program that can appear to be a jungle through which you have to hack your way with a machete. However, it is much easier if you have a clear idea of where you want to go. As with modern cell phones, Photoshop has countless functions that are very rarely or never used in practice. There are also truly essential tools that will help you achieve results that are as good as those obtained in the analog darkroom. The most important aspect of this type of work is the ability to selectively manipulate individual parts of an image. You can create outstanding black and white photos with subtle gray tones by following the path through the Photoshop jungle to the three Lasso tools. These tools allow you to select individual areas in the picture for customized manipulation. By right-clicking on the Lasso icon in your tool bar, three Lasso tools appear: the normal Lasso, the Polygonal Lasso, and the Magnetic Lasso.

Making Selections Using the Lasso

The photo of the Piazza Colonna in Palermo (figure 31–1) is the result of a typical chance situation of a type that many photographers dislike. The backlit sky shows nice contrast in the clouds, but because the buildings and statues are in the shade they have been given a muddy, gray look by the default black and white conversion settings.

However, we can rectify this situation by using the Lasso tool to make selective adjustments to the image. Simply click the Lasso icon and select the highest possible Feather value (250 pixels). This means that the area of transition between the manipulated and nonmanipulated parts of the image are interpolated over an area that is 250 pixels wide, making the difference undetectable in the finished image.



Figure 31–1



Figure 31–2

You can now select the part of the image you wish to manipulate by pressing the mouse button and drawing around it. With a large Feather value, you don't have to draw accurately. In this case, it makes sense to select the entire lower half of the image. Once you have completed the selection shape, the program draws a frame around it (figure 31–2). The breadth of the frame is due to the feathered edge. You can now use the Brightness/Contrast tool (or the more

complex Levels and Curves tools) to adjust brightness and contrast.



Figure 31–3

The Brightness/Contrast tool has delivered consistently great results since its CS3 release and rarely produces burned-out highlights or detail-free shadows. Here, increasing contrast by 90% and brightness by 80% transforms the previously soft-looking lower half of the image, resulting in a perfectly acceptable overall result (figure 31–3).

Partial Manipulation with the Magnetic Lasso

The next photo, taken with a 19 mm lens from the ramparts of the castle in Heidelberg, was a difficult subject to photograph digitally because it is not easy to shoot a backlit sun shining through a hazy sky in a way that prevents all the lit area around the sun from burning out and losing all detail. Therefore, the first requirement for making this a good picture was to use a gradient filter to gradually darken the sky by one to two exposure values. Then I used the highlight indicator on the display to control exposure so the sun itself would blink but not the halo around it. The respective exposure and the filter ensure enough detail in the immediate vicinity of the sun. As far as the image is concerned, all prerequisites have been met for creating a nicely textured, atmospheric photo.



Figure 31–4



Figure 31–5

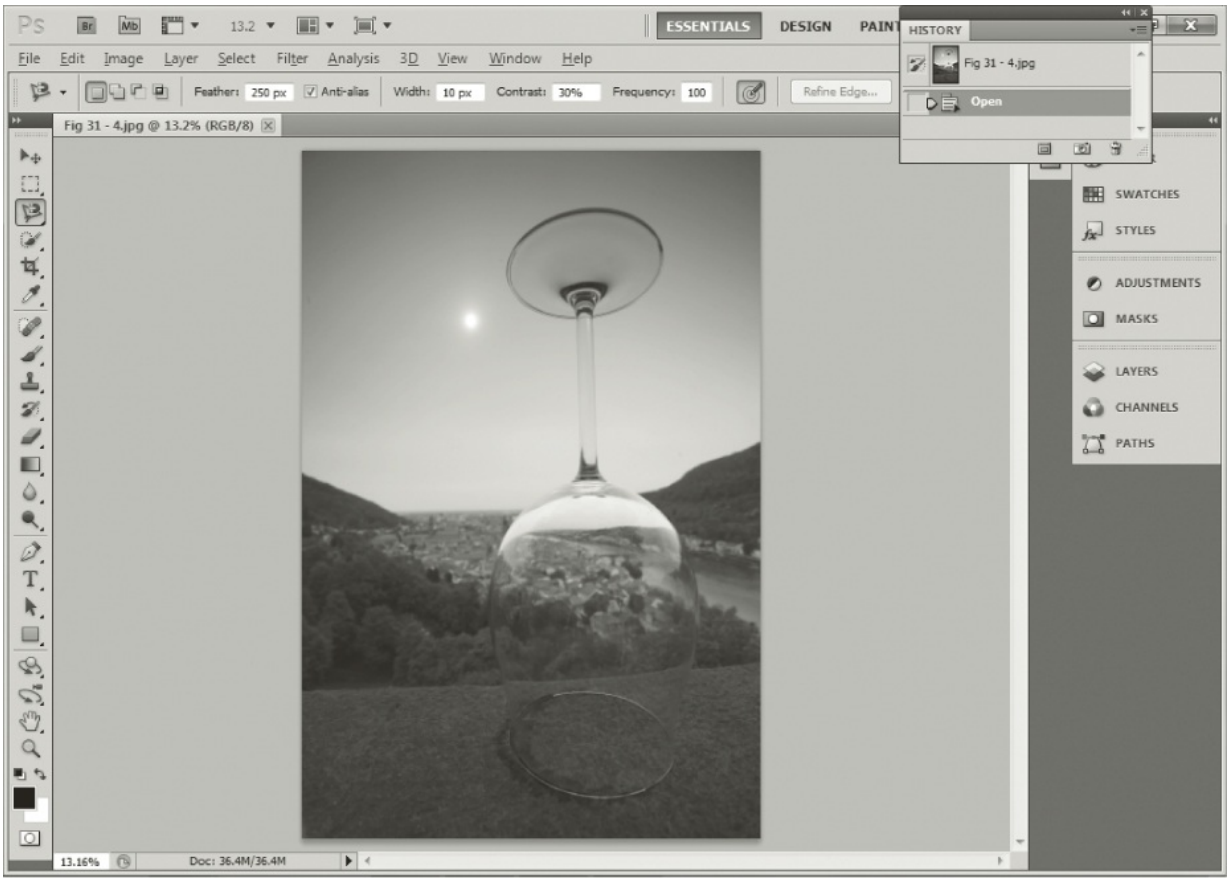


Figure 31–6

After developing it with the RAW converter, I opened the color photo in Photoshop and converted it to a black and white image using the Black & White tool's default settings (figure 31–4). The sky now has a pretty nice gray value gradation, but the lower part of the image remains too dark and flat. If I increase the contrast in the entire photo (regardless of the tool I use), I encounter a problem: The pleasing gray tone gradient I had in the sky gets the so-called jagged look (figure 31–5) so typical of digital images. To prevent these jagged edges and conserve the nice and gradual gray tonality of the sky, I left the sky alone and, as in the previous example, concentrated my manipulating efforts only on the lower part of the photo.

To prevent jagged edges, adjust the edge contrast as follows:

1. Enlarge the photo on your screen.
2. Right-click the Lasso tool and select the Magnetic Lasso (figure 31–6). The Magnetic Lasso appears and recognizes contrast.
3. Guide the mouse to place anchor points automatically along those lines where there is contrast.

4. Adjust the edge contrast (in this case 30%).

You can even adjust the distance between anchor points that adjoin an edge. In this case I selected a Frequency value of 100, which is the smallest possible recommended distance for organic shapes that have irregular curves. As in the previous example, I selected a Feather value of 250 pixels to keep the transitions between manipulated and unmanipulated areas unobtrusive. With clear architectural forms, the distance between anchor points can be significantly greater. However, especially with architectural photos, the Magnetic Lasso sometimes is placed on the wrong edges. If this occurs, practice how to adjust the various setting points to rectify the problem. Basically, it is a good idea to set the width of the path to 10 pixels, but you can even narrow it down to 3 pixels with clear architectural shapes.

As the picture shows, you can easily place the Magnetic Lasso around the cropped section you want to manipulate. If the markings do not appear in the desired position, you can also set the anchor points manually by using individual mouse clicks. If a point is in the wrong position, you can remove the last point once again with the delete key. After you have carefully moved the tool around the section you want to manipulate and correctly placed the anchor points, double-click and a line of “marching ants” indicates that you can start changing the cropped area (figure 31-7). If you now use the Brightness/Contrast tool to increase contrast in the lower part of the image, the result is perfectly acceptable (figure 31–8). The contrast within the town is fine, while the lower elements of the trees and the wall still look quite dull. I can rectify this dullness with a second Brightness/Contrast adjustment, this time selected using the normal Lasso. I adjusted both sliders to values of +75 (figure 31–9) to produce better contrast in the lower portion of the frame.

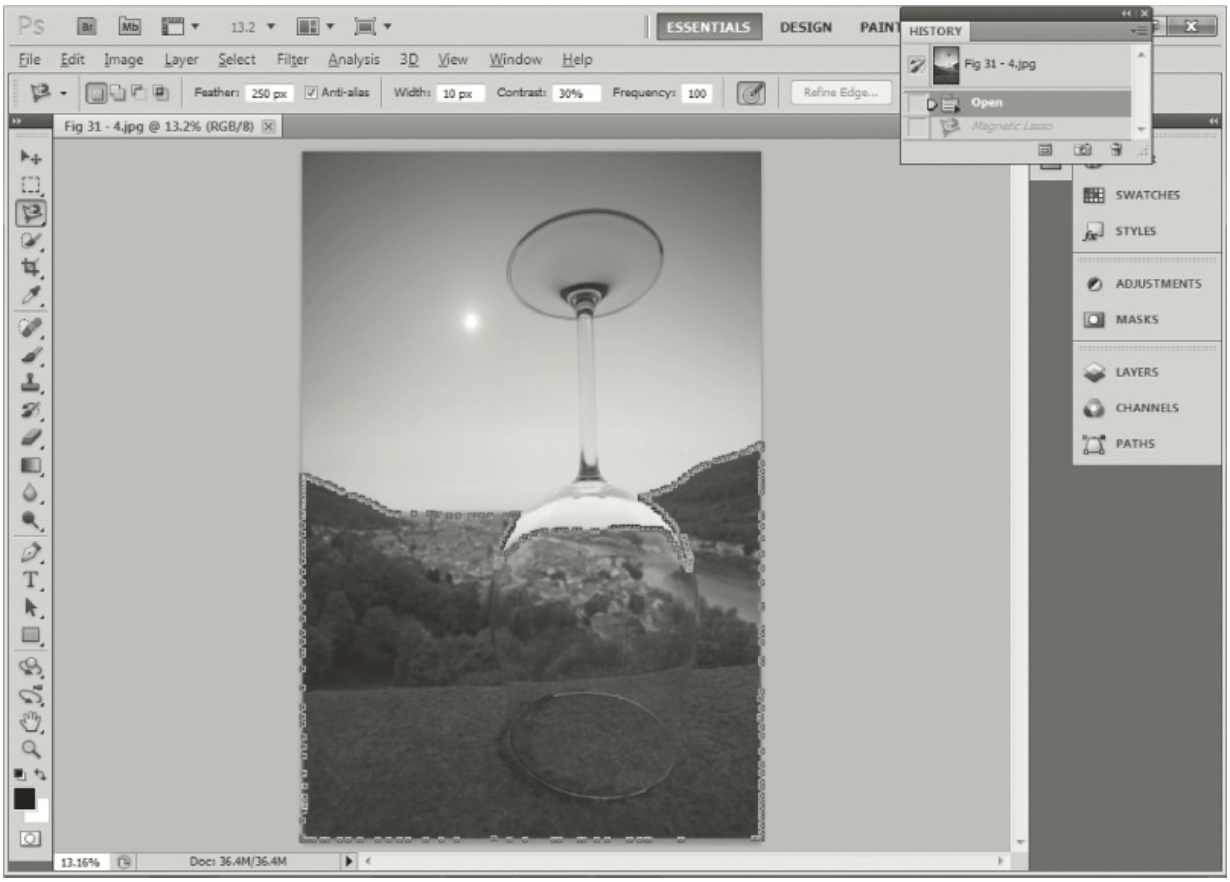

ESSENTIALS
DESIGN
File Edit Image Layer Select Filter Analysis 3D View Window Help
Feather: 250 px
Anti-alias
Width: 10 px
Contrast: 30%
Frequency: 100
Refine Edge...
Fig 31 - 4.jpg @ 13.2% (RGB/8)
HISTORY
Fig 31 - 4.jpg
Open
Magnetic Lasso
SWATCHES
STYLES
ADJUSTMENTS
MASKS
LAYERS
CHANNELS
PATHS
13.16%
Doc: 36.4M/36.4M

Figure 31–7

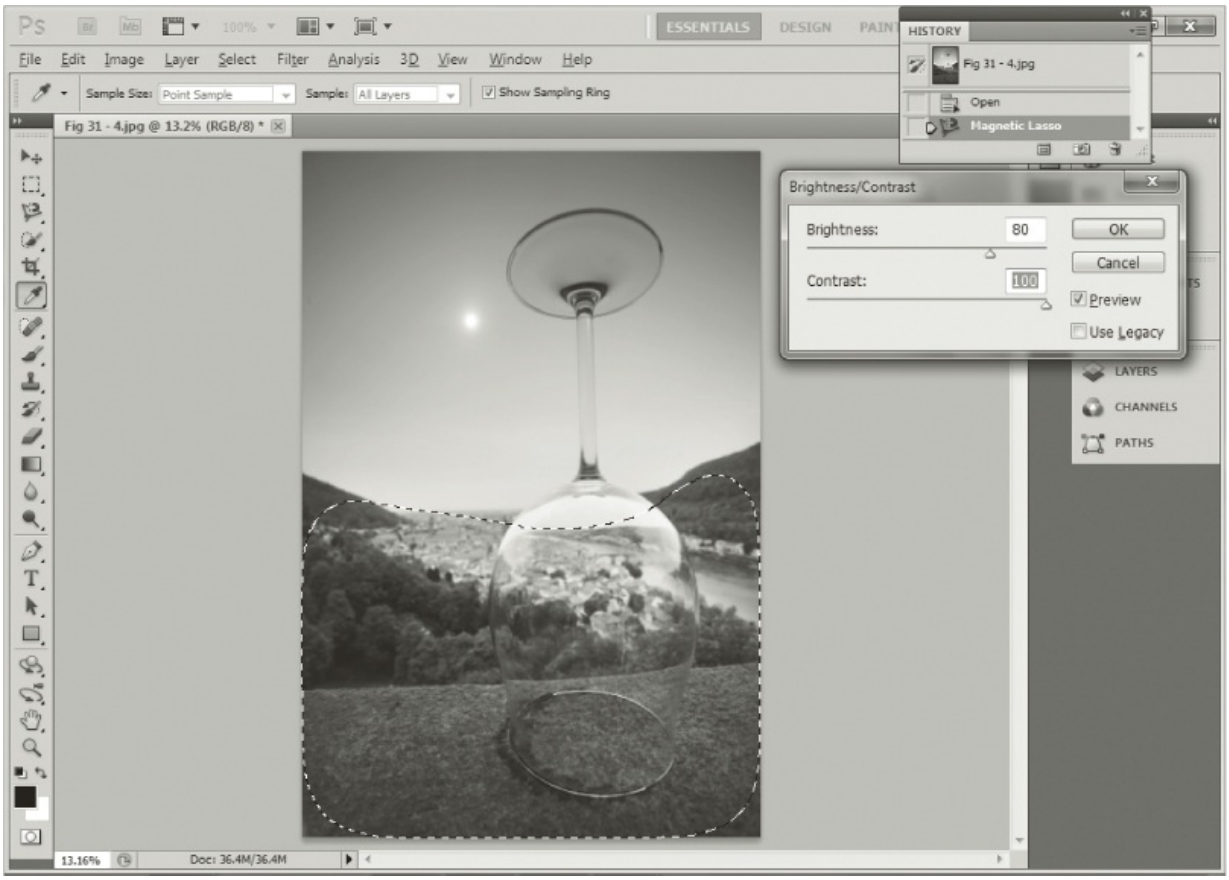

ESSENTIALS
DESIGN
File Edit Image Layer Select Filter Analysis 3D View Window Help
Sample Size: Point Sample
Sample: All Layers
Show Sampling Ring
Fig 31 - 4.jpg @ 13.2% (RGB/8) *
HISTORY
Fig 31 - 4.jpg
Open
Magnetic Lasso
Brightness/Contrast
Brightness: 80
Contrast: 100
OK
Cancel
Preview
Use Legacy
LAYERS
CHANNELS
PATHS
13.16%
Doc: 36.4M/36.4M

Figure 31–8



Figure 31–9

The overall result (figure 31–10) is really very good and is in stark contrast to the original default conversion shown in figure 31–4. The result here is better than we could ever have achieved using analog dodging techniques.



Figure 31–10



Figure 31–11

Partial Manipulation of Architectural Lines with the Polygonal Lasso

While I recommend the Magnetic Lasso for selecting organic shapes, the Polygonal Lasso is my favorite tool for selecting all other types of shapes. Even if the tool appears to make very angular selections, using a high Feather value produces smooth selections that stick very closely to the outlines of all sorts of shapes. This tool is great for making rough selections and especially suitable for selecting architectural details. After I converted this picture to black and white (figure 31–11), you can see that the lower part is especially dark and flat. If I brighten the entire image, detail in the clouds is lost, so a selective manipulation of only the lower part makes sense. Because the area to be manipulated has exactly four corners, it is very easy to use the Polygonal Lasso tool to surround the glassy bridge that connects the two buildings. Thus, I placed the anchor points of the Polygonal Lasso tool on these four corners (figure 31–12) by clicking once where I wanted to start the polygon. Then I guided the lasso until it reached the next corner and pulled the polygon line like a rubber band behind it. After clicking the second corner, the polygon line is laid down right along the straight corner. This is certainly the ideal tool for edging straight corners, but it is possible to switch back and forth between the Magnetic Lasso and the Polygonal Lasso. It works like this:

1. Start edging with the Magnetic Lasso.
2. Hold down the Alt (Windows) or Option (Mac OS) key and click the mouse to switch to the Polygonal Lasso. Keep the Alt or Option key depressed as you anchor points on each corner.
3. Release the Alt or Option key and click the mouse to automatically bring back the Magnetic Lasso.

In this photo, however, the Polygonal Lasso fully meets my needs. When I have returned to the beginning point after having edged the desired area, a simple click makes the “marching ants” appear to indicate that I can now start manipulating this selected area.

The photo looks considerably better now, and I can use the Brightness/Contrast tool for brightening the very dark, lower part without worrying about losing texture in the highlights. To further improve this image, brightness was increased by 42 points and contrast was increased by 100 points (figure 31–13). Nevertheless, the total image could still look better with a little

more contrast, but this would be hard to achieve with conventional tools. In addition, if I used the Brightness/Contrast tool again, the highlights in the clouds would lose their detail. Beginning with Photoshop CS3 there is yet another wonderful option, the already mentioned midtone contrast of the Shadows/Highlights tool. With this tool, you can increase midtone contrast without burning out highlights or allowing shadows to go under. In the photo, the midtone contrast was increased by 22 points, achieving a perfect picture (figure 31–14). A word of advice: Do not increase midtone contrast to an extraordinary degree because your photos will start looking unnatural and sometimes bright edges will start forming in the bright and dark transition points.

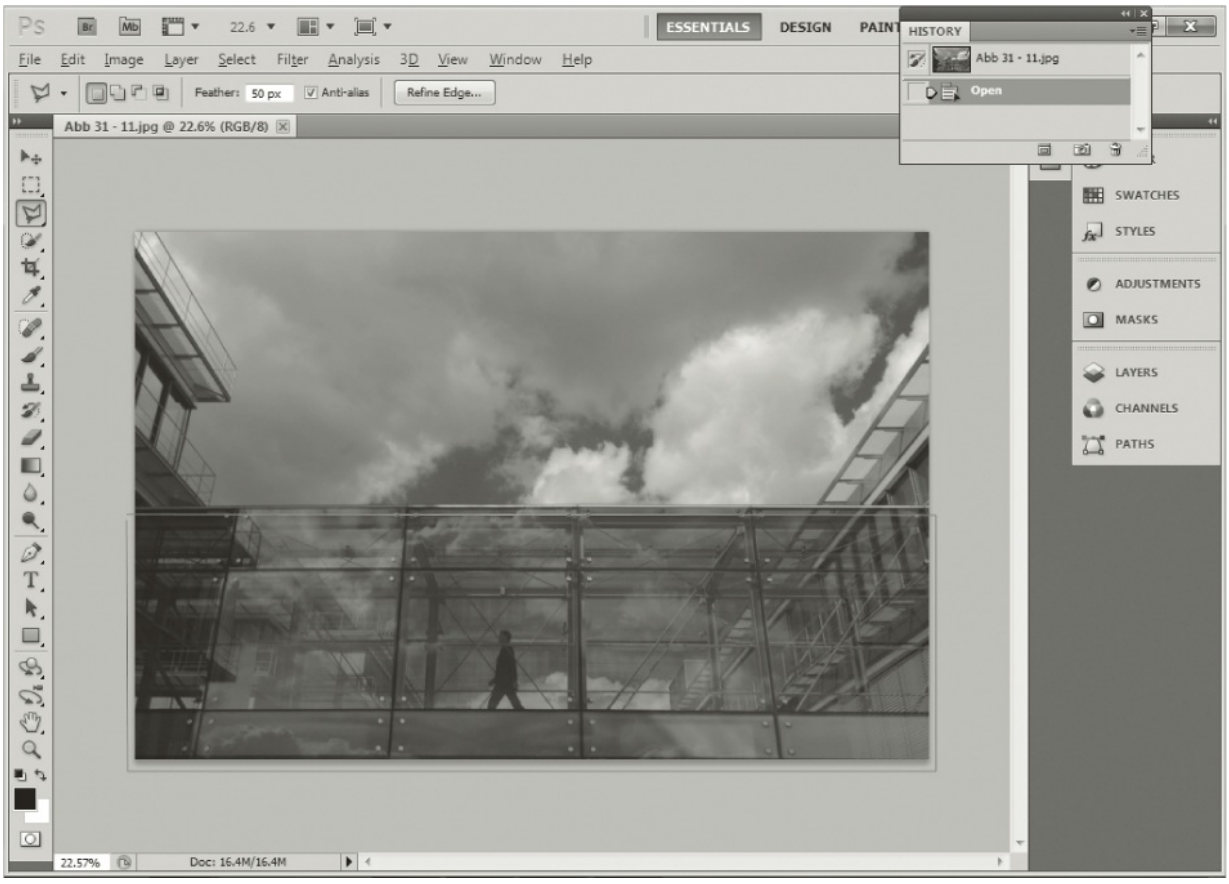


Figure 31–12

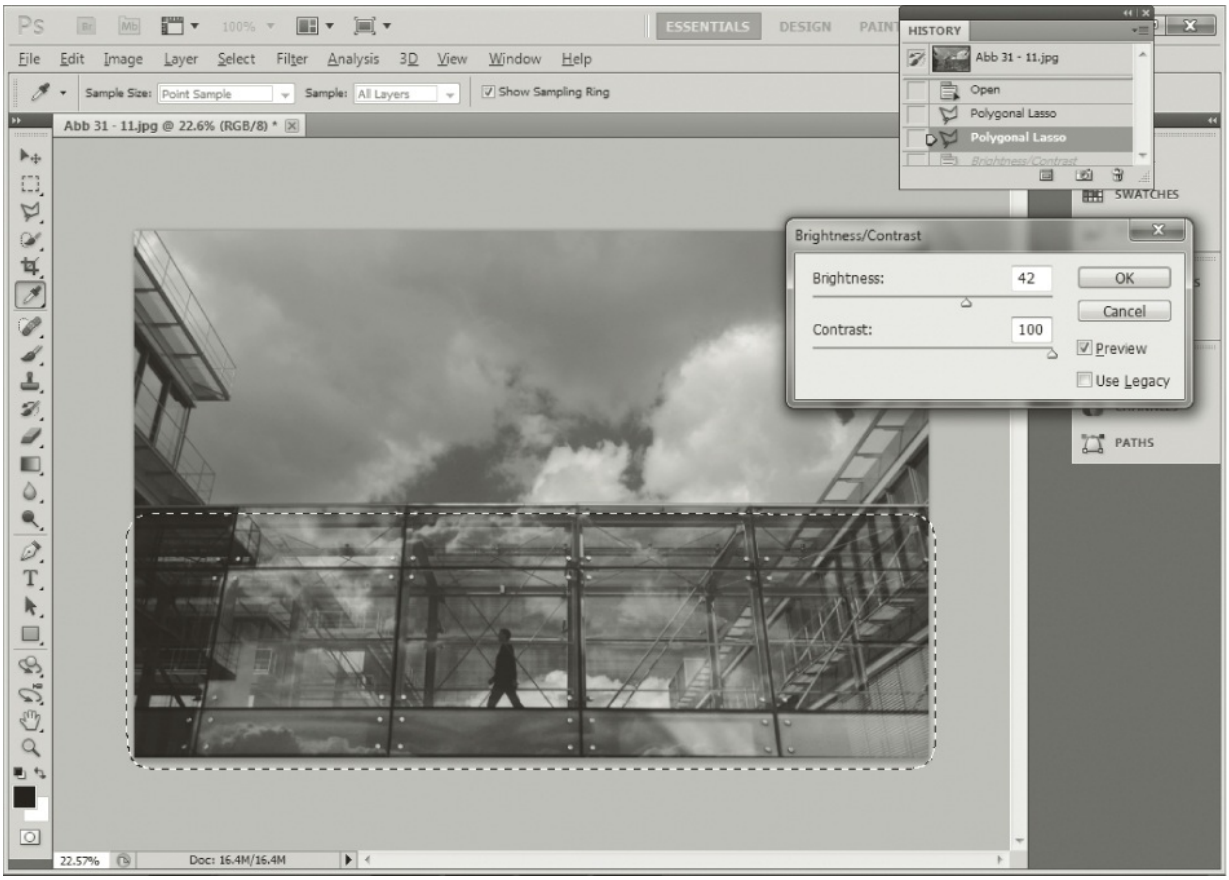


Figure 31–13

The Lasso is another example of a digital tool that is far superior to any that are available in a conventional analog darkroom.



Figure 31–14

32 Dodging, Burning, and Retouching

More Precise Dodging and Burning than the Analog Darkroom Ever Allowed

The essential aspect of analog black and white image retouching was to control the tonality range by skillfully dodging and burning in the darkroom. There was hardly a black and white photo that did not need this for optimizing the mood of the picture. While analog fans may find it hard to believe, this procedure can be accomplished easier, faster, and more precisely with Photoshop. I'll illustrate this with a backlit photo of an old Irish castle.

It is extraordinarily difficult for a digital camera to register the light range in a backlit photograph that includes both the sun and the shadows of an old wall. Therefore, I remind you once again to use a gradient filter of almost two apertures. It is also necessary in such lighting conditions to photograph in RAW mode because recording RAW data allows the camera to register a significantly wider light range compared to JPEG format. And lastly, it is essential to underexpose the photo until the lights around the sun are no longer broken up; in other words, until the indicator light on your LCD blinks only in the sun itself and not around it. If you follow all of these recommendations, you should get a somewhat dark photo.

Here, the old castle ruin looks dark and flat at first. To convert the photo to black and white and create a more dramatic sky, I used the Photoshop Yellow Filter preset. After the photo is converted, the castle looks almost pitch black and lacks detail, but don't worry; this is a photo taken in the RAW format and converted into an uncompressed TIFF file that has, nonetheless, retained all information.



Figure 32–1



Figure 32–2

To brighten the image, I could use the Shadows/Highlights tool mentioned earlier. However, brightening the image by about 20% will have the unfortunate effect of making the sky appear brighter as well, especially the upper part (figure 32–2), and the image will lose part of its heavy, mystical effect. Instead, I would suggest using the ingenious Dodge tool.

Before using this tool, enlarge your image on your screen and adjust the circle to a large size. For this image, I set the diameter to 501 pixels (figure 32–3). It's best for Hardness to stay at 0% so the circular shape is not reproduced anywhere, not even partially. The intensity of the brightness effect can also be adjusted with various settings under Exposure. In my opinion, a good value for careful dodging is 20%. Under Range, you can decide whether you want emphasis to be placed on Shadows, Highlights, or Midtones. In this photo, it would be logical to select Shadows because I am dealing almost exclusively with nearly pitch-black areas. Nonetheless, I used the Midtones setting because I wanted to retain the almost black personality of the old fortress. Using the

Shadows setting will quickly turn a saturated black into a dark gray, but this would not make any sense here. I wanted to retain the impression of an almost black castle and merely add a bit of detail into it, something I can achieve admirably with the Dodge tool set to Midtones.

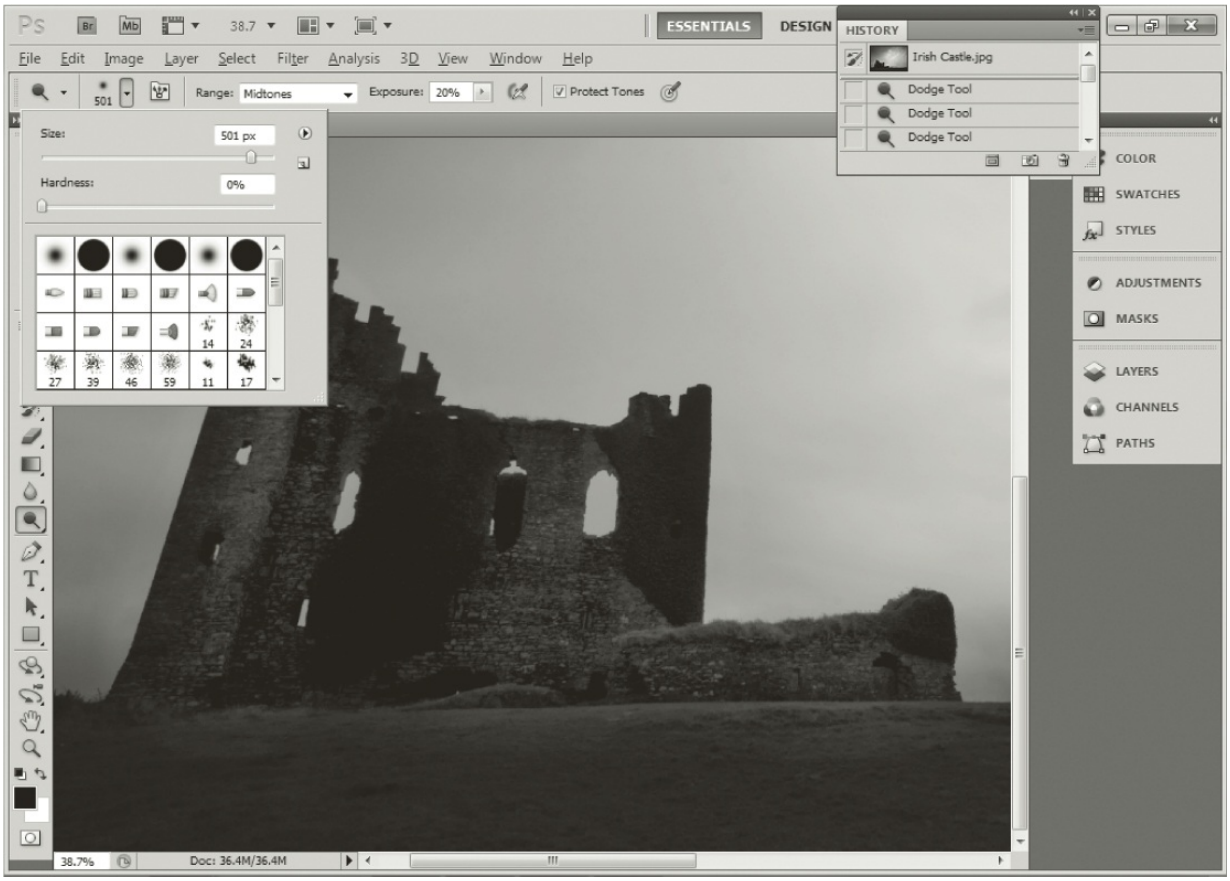


Figure 32–3

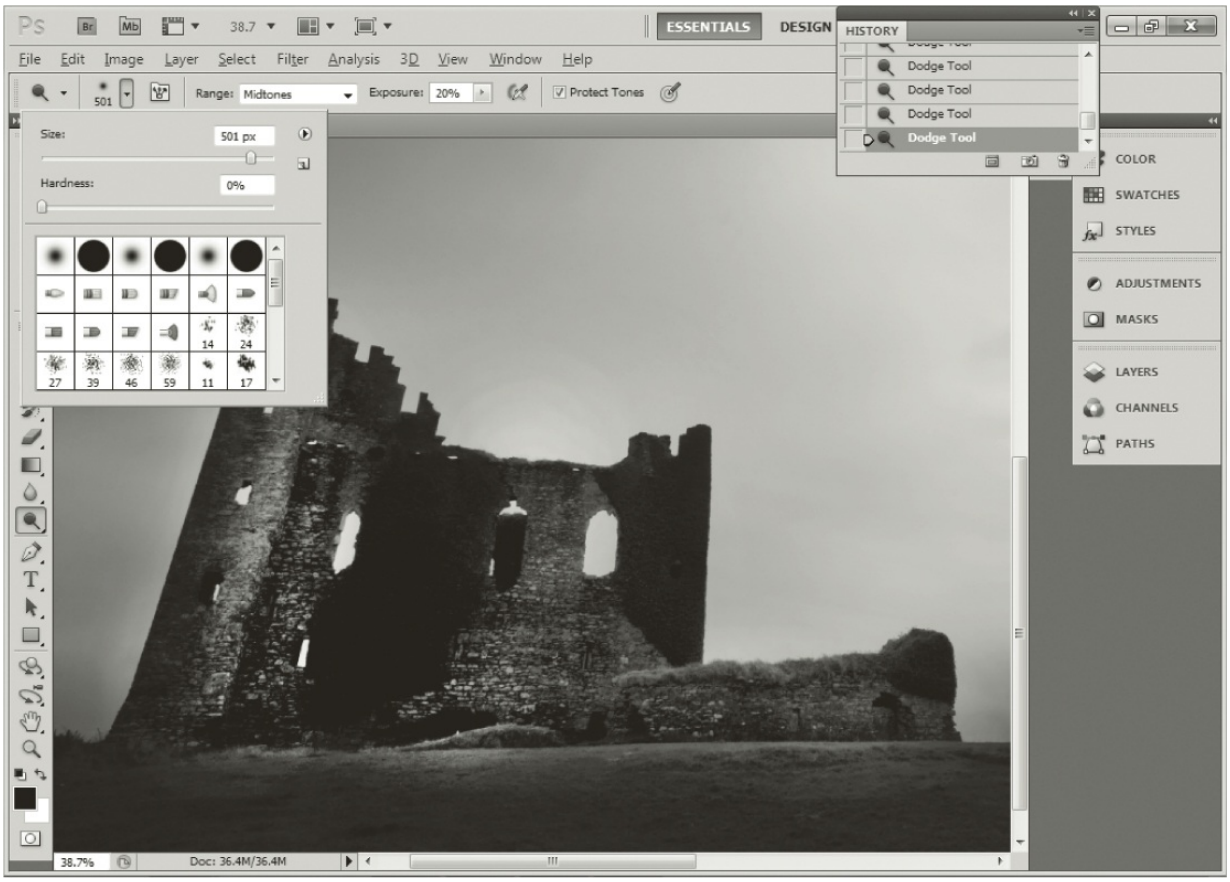


Figure 32–4

Once you have adjusted your settings, position the circle over the area to be lightened and click your mouse. Every click of the mouse brightens the area by 20%, so you have to keep clicking until you achieve the desired brightness. If you have used the large circle for performing the rough work, you can choose a much smaller circle (here, 62 pixels) in the next step for the more precise work, such as brightening the castle's borders and upper sections in my example. The entire procedure should not take you longer than two minutes.

In figure 32–4, you can see that the old walls now have much more texture. Looking at the whole picture, all available technical means have been used to support the mystical effect of these walls (figure 32–5). The enormous range of light that digital photography is capable of dealing with is indeed amazing.

Just as easy as it is to dodge with Photoshop, you can also naturally burn. Let's use a somewhat mystical winter scene as an example. Once again, I have a backlit photo with an extreme light range that the sensor must deal with (figure 32–6). The RAW format has been able to capture this range quite well, but the highlights in the sky (right) lack some detail. Right-click on the icon for the

Dodge tool and select the Burn tool option, then follow the same steps as with the Dodge tool. For this image, I used a diameter of 180 pixels. You could choose Highlights for burning, but it’s not a good idea because the bright areas should remain bright. You can add detail to the bright lights by setting the Burn tool to Midtones. Sure enough, I was able to get a nice texture in the sky’s highlights (figure 32–7).



Figure 32–5



Figure 32–6

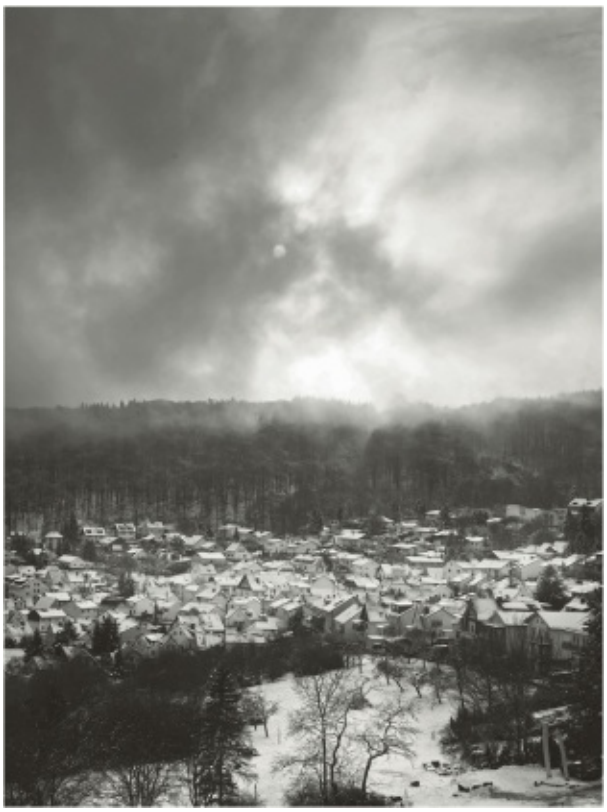


Figure 32–7

The third tool you see when you right-click on the Dodge tool icon, the Sponge, should not be used for black and white photography because it is used to intensify or reduce color saturation.

Include Gradient Sky Tones

I don’t get tired of recommending the use of a gradient filter to make sure the sky will have enough detail, not only in a backlit photo, and to make a boring sky more exciting.

The next photo, of St. Malo, shows the organic growth of the historical district (figure 32–8). I took the photo on a dull day, something that certainly does not harm the mood, but the sky is a little too bright. However, help is readily available as follows:

1. Choose the Gradient tool (on the toolbar).
2. Select a gray gradient from the drop-down menu on the top toolbar (uppermost left box). If you then go farther to the right in the top toolbar, you

will see five additional small symbols.

3. Choose the first symbol, Linear Gradient.
4. Keep moving to the right to reach the Mode and select Darken.
5. Adjust the gradient's Opacity; 20% is reasonable for this picture.
6. Check all three fields: Reverse, Dither, and Transparency (figure 32–9).



Figure 32–8

You have finished with the preparation and can now set the start and end points of the gradient with your mouse. I started my gradient a little above the roofs and chimneys.

7. Select a starting point and left-click, and while holding down the left-click button, move the mouse upward until you reach the upper border of the picture. You will see that a line has formed from the starting point to the end point.
8. Release the mouse button. Photoshop will exactly calculate the constant gray gradient along this line and will distribute it from the left to the right image border.

It's that easy to include a gradient in the sky after shooting a picture! The photo is much more exciting now; there is a kind of "roof" over the houses (figure 32–10).


ESSENTIALS
DESIGN
PAINTING
CS Live
File Edit Image Layer Select Filter Analysis 3D View Window Help
Mode: Normal
Opacity: 20%
Reverse
Dither
Transparency
HISTORY
Abb 32 - 8.jpg
Open
Gradient
STYLES
ADJUSTMENTS
MASKS
LAYERS
CHANNELS
PATHS
12.5%
Doc: 48.2M/48.2M

Figure 32–9



Figure 32–10

Retouching

Older DSLRs have a common problem: the dirtying of the sensors and low-pass filters placed before each sensor. Each time the lens is changed dust can enter the housing, and then when the shutter is opened the dust can reach the low-pass filter, thus becoming visible on the image. However, the sensor in every DSLR can be easily cleaned. You may choose to have your sensor professionally cleaned at a camera shop, or you could do it yourself (using great care) as follows. After selecting the option to clean the sensor from your camera's menu, the shutter will remain open as long as needed, giving you plenty of time to unscrew the lens and carefully use a small blower to remove any dust that is on the sensor. When doing so, it's a good idea to hold the camera with the sensor pointing downward so the blown dust will fall out of the camera. Make sure the tip of the blower doesn't touch the low-pass filter!

Even if you periodically clean the sensor, small dust particles will keep appearing as spots on the image because every time you change the lens, new dust will enter the housing. This disadvantage of digital SLR cameras is almost

convincing enough to stick to compact cameras or zoom lenses to keep lens changing to a minimum. Many newer DSLRs have self-cleaning sensors that shake off any dust that has settled on the sensor when you power your camera on. However, this still doesn't guarantee a completely dust-free sensor. If you decide to buy a DSLR camera, you have to come to terms with the dust problem and practice digital retouching. As always, Photoshop offers several solutions. The Dust and Scratches function included in earlier versions of the program's Noise filter was said to be able to remove all dust spots in one sitting, but it was not always able to correctly recognize all spots in spite of various settings. Sometimes, it even left small borders around the retouched spots or erroneously recognized image details as dust spots.



Figure 32–11

To remove dust spots reliably, it's safest to retouch them with the Clone Stamp. This tool can transfer any desired pictorial pattern to any place on the image. As far as retouching is concerned, this means that most of the time, you will transfer the spot's pattern of the immediate surroundings to the spot itself.

Let's look at the portrait in figure 32–11. Here, a thick, fuzzy dust spot was on the sensor, but retouching it was very easy: I selected the Clone Stamp tool from the toolbar and adjusted the size of the circle so that the diameter is about as large as the narrow side of the fuzzy dust spot, in this case 83 pixels (figure 32–12). In a photo such as this one, I recommend working with blurred edges and leaving border sharpness (Hardness) at 0%.

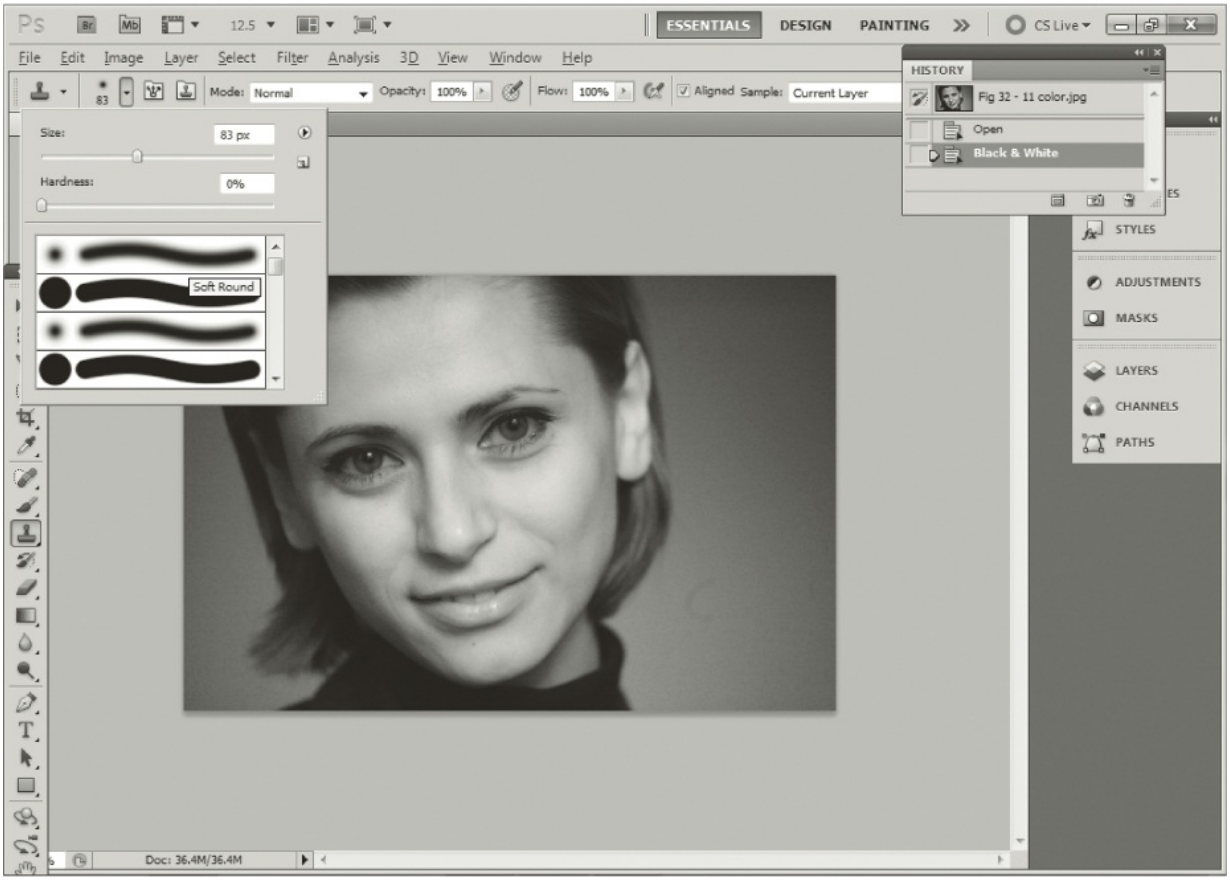


Figure 32–12

Follow these steps:

1. Move the circle to a place next to the large dust spot, where the gray tones are the same as they would be under the dust spot; in this case, just to the right of the spot (figure 32–13).

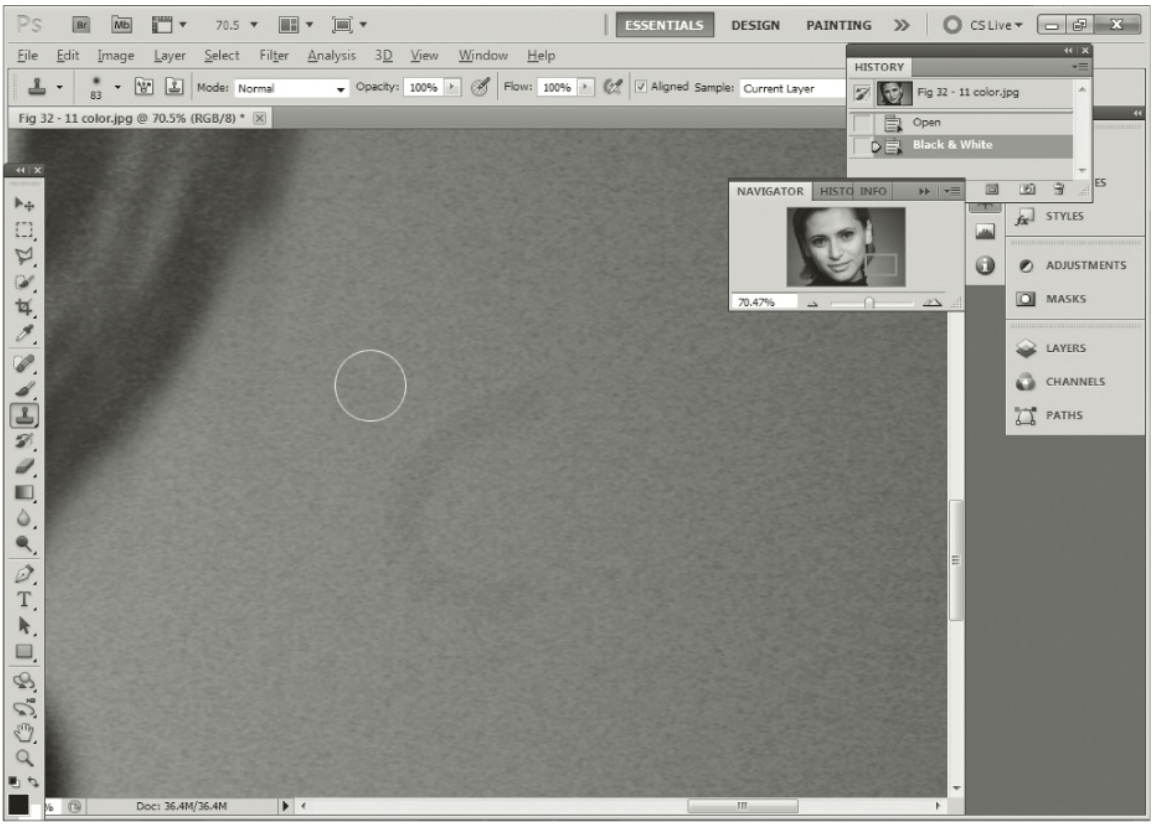


Figure 32–13

2. Press the Alt (Windows) or Option (Mac OS) key and the circle becomes a small target marking the starting point of the transfer.
3. Left-click, and while holding down the Alt or Option key and the mouse, move the circle to where you would like to copy the structure of the starting point, which in this case is the upper part of the dust spot.
4. Release both keys and the distance and angle in which the structure of the starting point will be copied are set. Distance and angle are maintained as long as they are corrected again by pressing the Alt or Option key.
5. Move the dust spot downward with the selected circle while left-clicking and holding down the mouse.

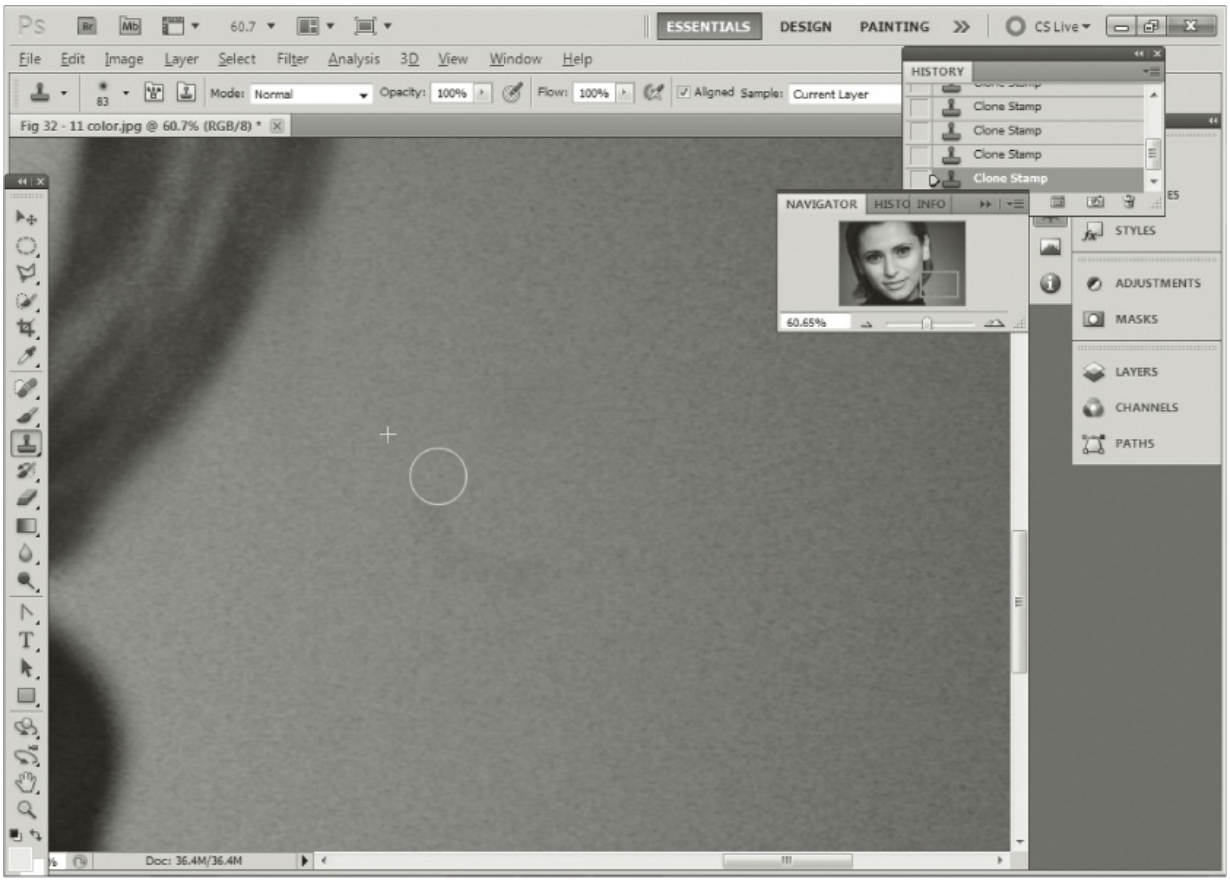

ESSENTIALS
DESIGN
PAINTING
CS Live
File Edit Image Layer Select Filter Analysis 3D View Window Help
Mode: Normal
Opacity: 100%
Flow: 100%
Aligned
Sample: Current Layer
Fig 32 - 11 color.jpg @ 60.7% (RGB/8) *
HISTORY
Clone Stamp
Clone Stamp
Clone Stamp
Clone Stamp
NAVIGATOR
HISTO
INFO
60.65%
STYLES
ADJUSTMENTS
MASKS
LAYERS
CHANNELS
PATHS
Doc: 36.4M/36.4M

Figure 32–14

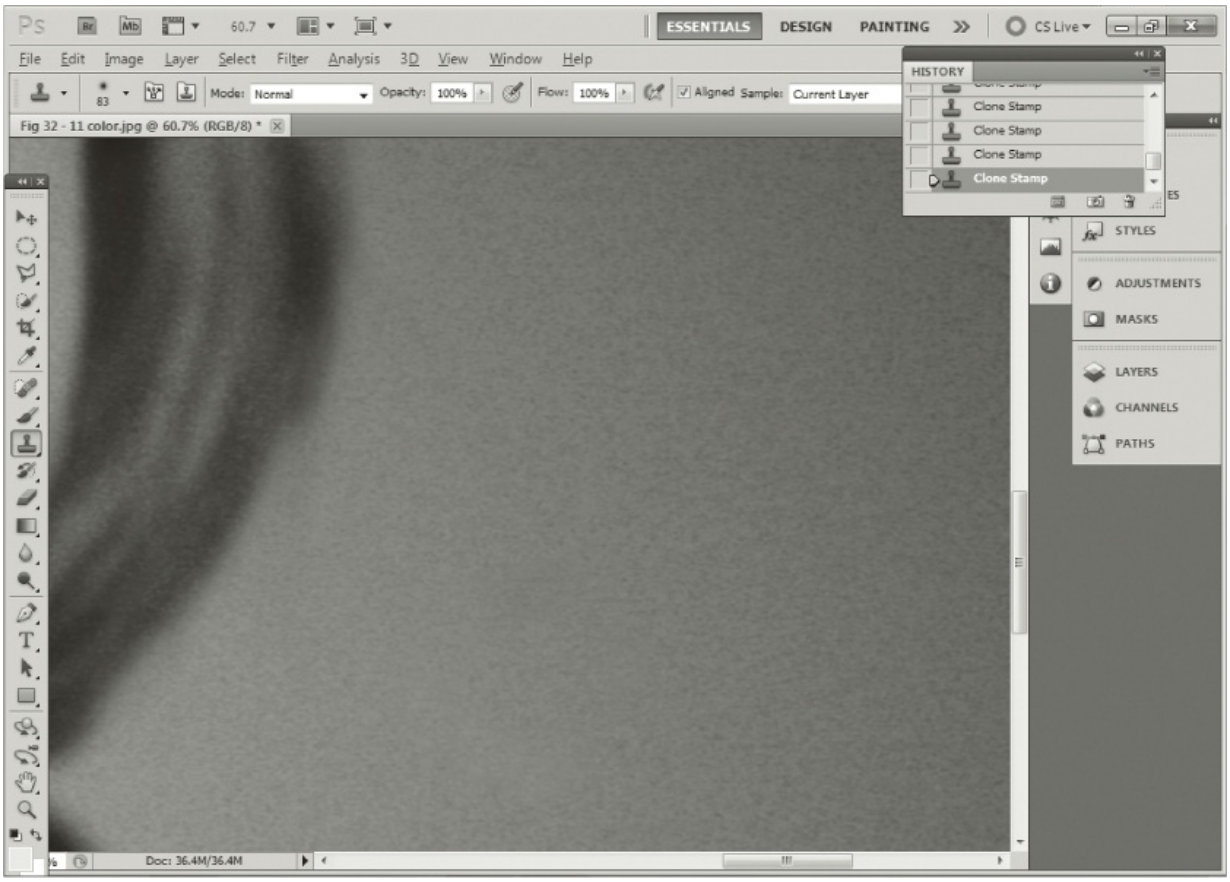

ESSENTIALS
DESIGN
PAINTING
CS Live
File Edit Image Layer Select Filter Analysis 3D View Window Help
Mode: Normal
Opacity: 100%
Flow: 100%
Aligned
Sample: Current Layer
Fig 32 - 11 color.jpg @ 60.7% (RGB/8) *
HISTORY
Clone Stamp
Clone Stamp
Clone Stamp
Clone Stamp
STYLES
ADJUSTMENTS
MASKS
LAYERS
CHANNELS
PATHS
Doc: 36.4M/36.4M

Figure 32–15

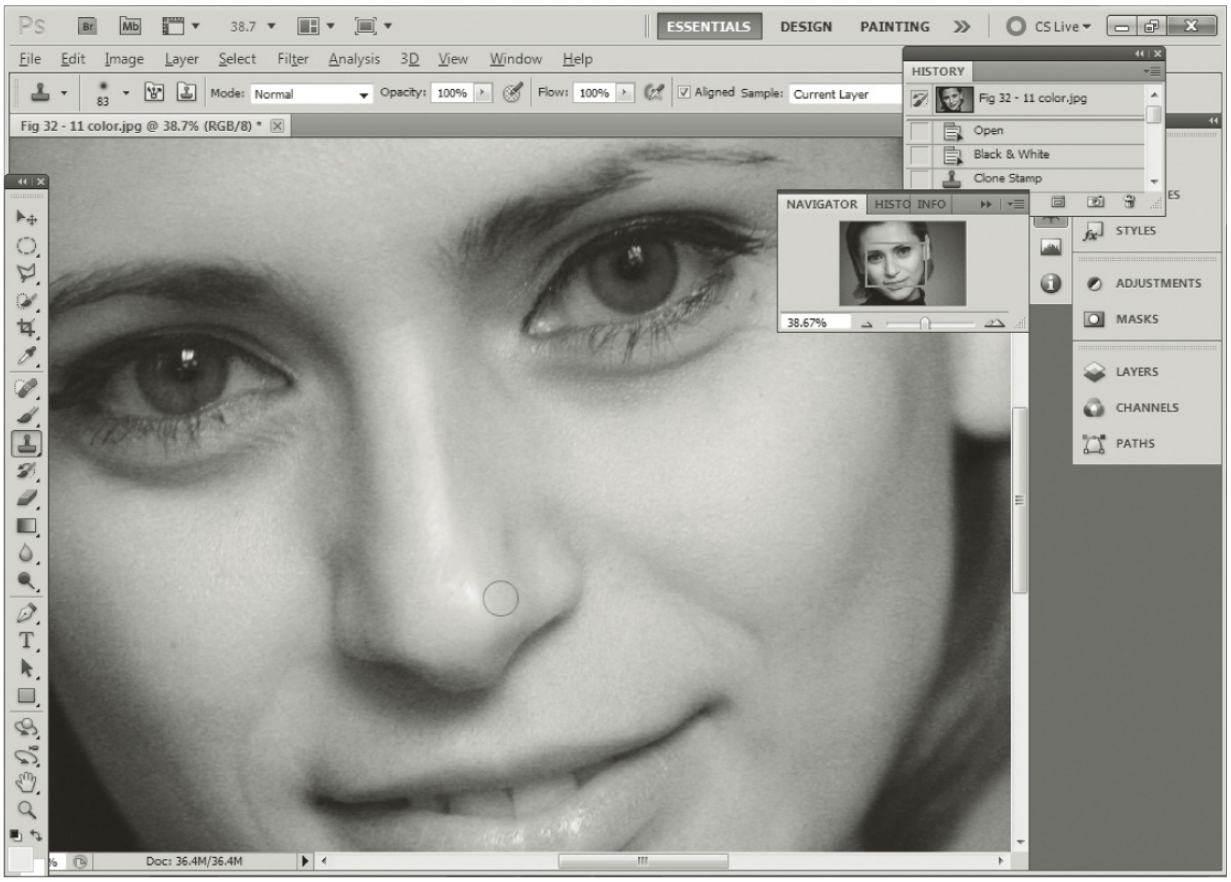


Figure 32–16

The left structure is now copied onto the entire fuzzy dust spot in the selected distance (figure 32–14). It doesn't take long for the spot to disappear (figure 32–15). However, you must remember to copy the correct gray tone onto the dust spot. If your attempt was not successful, you can undo every single copying step. In other words, with this tool you can experiment and decide which area from the surroundings will be the most suitable for copying.

However, retouching does not have to be restricted to large dust spots. In this photo, the young woman's nose has strong reflections in spite of indirect lighting. These reflections can also be easily eliminated with the Clone Stamp (figure 32–16). Her face has now been retouched and Photoshop has improved the facial makeup (figure 32–17). If retouching proves difficult, you can enlarge the image until you can work on the individual pixels with precision. However, this requires plenty of time and is very seldom needed.



Figure 32–17

33 Correcting Lens Errors and Distortion in Architectural Images

Wide-angle lenses have the property of distorting perspective provided they are not shift lenses, and the zoom lenses of most manufacturers distort more often along the edges; in other words, they produce barrel or pincushion distortion in architectural photos. In addition, these zoom lenses can cause vignetting when used with a fully opened aperture. With regard to digital photography, a special problem of wide-angle lenses is chromatic aberration, or color fringes, in the edges of images, of interest only in color photography, of course.

All these problems can be corrected with one single tool, namely the Lens Correction filter introduced in Photoshop CS5. This tool includes profiles that cover just about every current camera and lens model and makes correcting lens errors a comparatively simple task. In the photo in figure 33–1, taken using a Canon 70–200 mm telephoto zoom, there is barrel distortion at the 140 mm focal length. This would normally be reason enough to use a different lens for a photo such as this, but Photoshop makes it usable. All you have to do is enter the make and model of your camera and lens and Photoshop automatically corrects the appropriate optical errors (figure 33–2). The process corrects all distorted and converging architectural lines, especially at the edges of the frame. It wouldn't have been possible to use a zoom lens that produces this amount of distortion for an analog architectural shot, but digital imaging technology makes it possible to use all types of lenses in a hitherto unthinkably wide range of situations (figure 33–3).



Figure 33–1

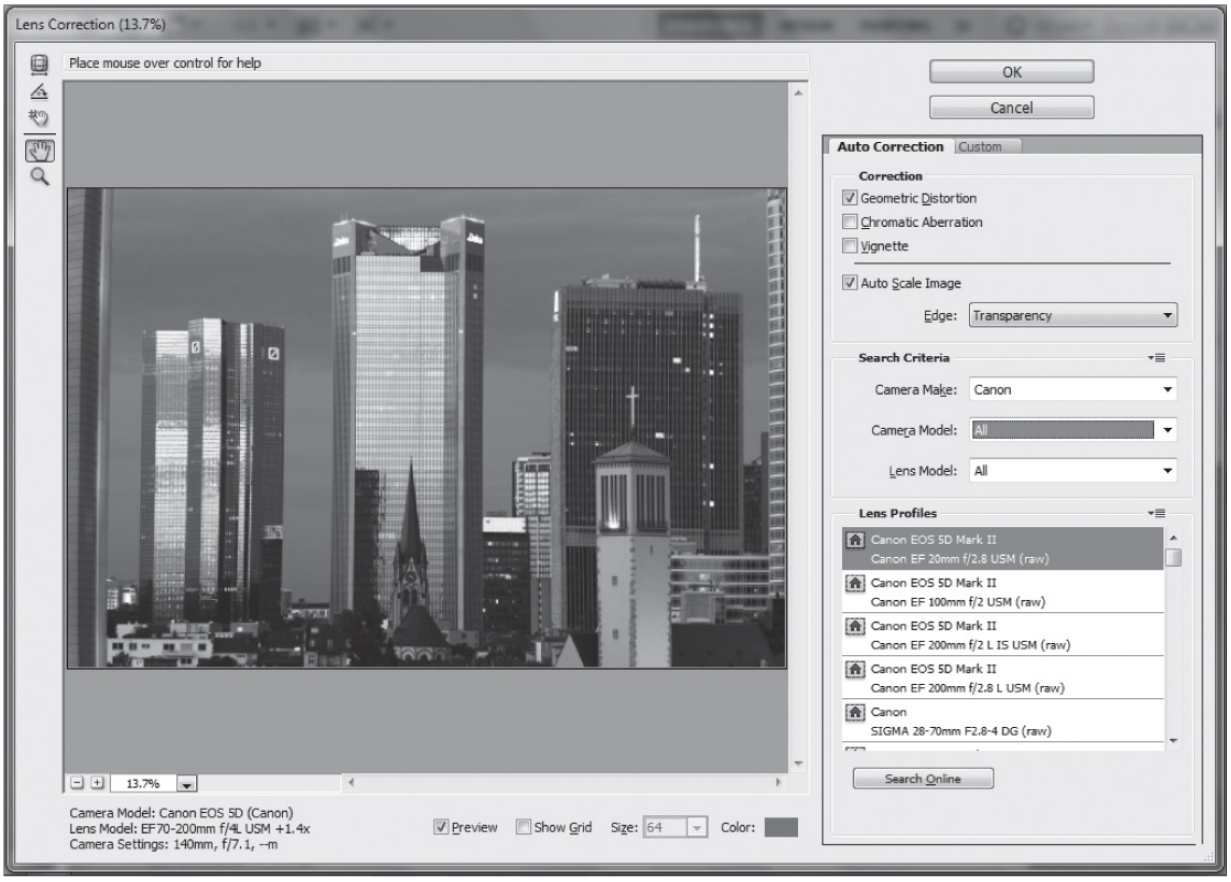


Figure 33–2

The Lens Correction tool also includes vignetting correction and chromatic

aberration correction functionality for combating fringing effects although personally, I prefer to use a RAW converter to correct these types of errors.

Shift Lenses Are Almost Superfluous

It is well known that wide-angle lenses distort architectural lines if you place the building on the lower edge of the photo because the camera is no longer parallel to the architecture. To compensate for the resulting converging lines, so-called shift lenses can be used to displace the entire optical plane upward so the camera can still be held parallel to the building, as long as the latter begins in the lower part of the image. Because shift lenses are very expensive, the serious amateur will question if they are really needed. As you have already seen, Photoshop provides the answer, and it's not a bad one at all. The photo of the Chrysler Building in New York (figure 33–4) is a good example. It was taken from about one-third of the way up the building using a 17 mm lens, making it necessary to tilt the camera upward. This caused a lot of distortion in the vertical lines of the building's façade. In this case, I had to work with a second Photoshop layer created using the Layer > Duplicate Layer command. Once I created the duplicate layer by clicking OK, I navigated to the Transform tool in the Edit menu. Here, I selected the Distort option from the menu (figure 33–5). The tool then presented me with a marquee with eight handles that I position using the mouse. The degree of correction this image required meant that I had to position some of the handles outside of the visible image frame, making it necessary to reduce the size of the image on the canvas (figure 33–6). To preserve the building's proportions, I had to stretch it out of the top of the frame to the same degree that I extended it sideways. This process naturally leads to cropping of parts of the original image but produces a result that is comparable with equivalent images photographed using specialized tilt/shift lenses (figure 33–7).



Figure 33–3



Figure 33–4

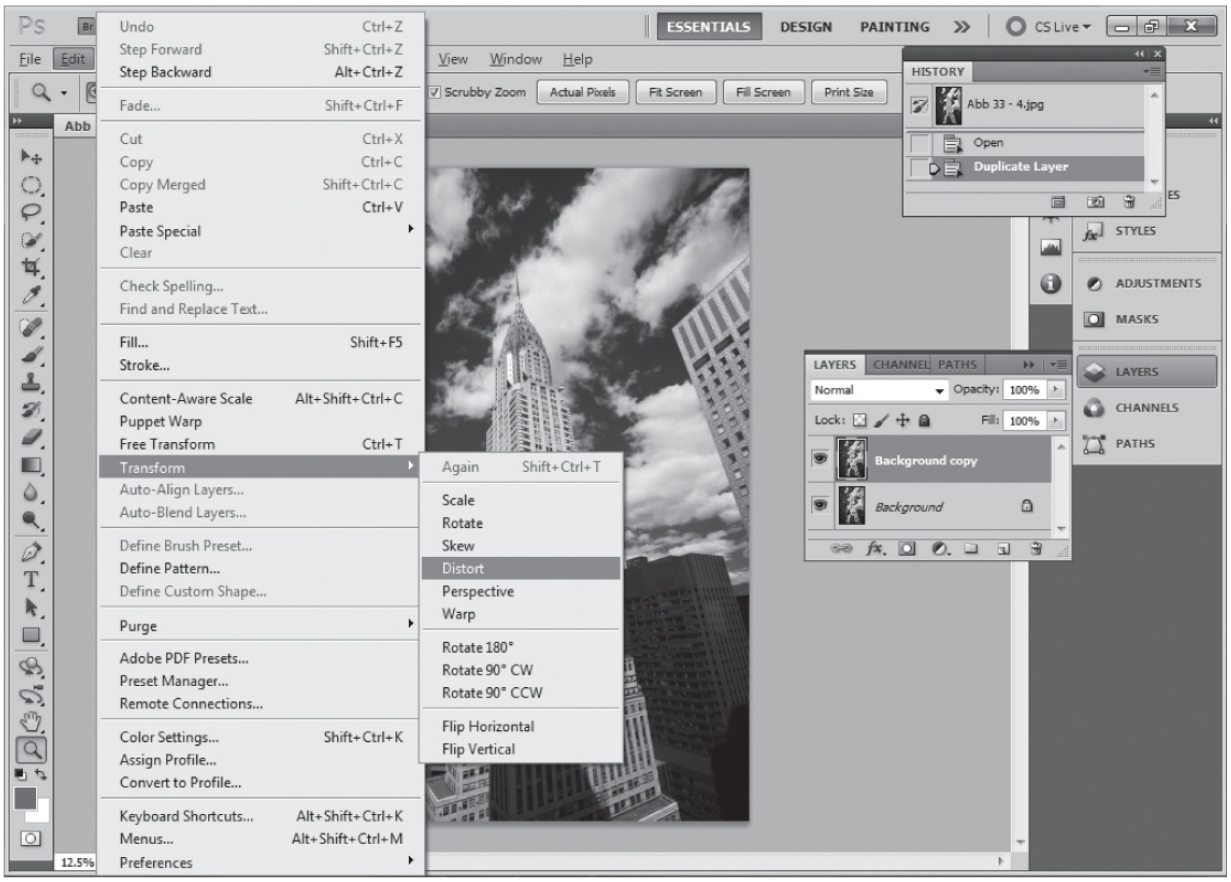

Undo Ctrl+Z
Step Forward Shift+Ctrl+Z
Step Backward Alt+Ctrl+Z
Fade... Shift+Ctrl+F
Cut Ctrl+X
Copy Ctrl+C
Copy Merged Shift+Ctrl+C
Paste Ctrl+V
Paste Special
Clear
Check Spelling...
Find and Replace Text...
Fill... Shift+F5
Stroke...
Content-Aware Scale Alt+Shift+Ctrl+C
Puppet Warp
Free Transform Ctrl+T
Transform
Auto-Align Layers...
Auto-Blend Layers...
Define Brush Preset...
Define Pattern...
Define Custom Shape...
Purge
Adobe PDF Presets...
Preset Manager...
Remote Connections...
Color Settings... Shift+Ctrl+K
Assign Profile...
Convert to Profile...
Keyboard Shortcuts... Alt+Shift+Ctrl+K
Menus... Alt+Shift+Ctrl+M
Preferences
Again Shift+Ctrl+T
Scale
Rotate
Skew
Distort
Perspective
Warp
Rotate 180°
Rotate 90° CW
Rotate 90° CCW
Flip Horizontal
Flip Vertical
ESSENTIALS
DESIGN
PAINTING
CS Live
HISTORY
Abb 33 - 4.jpg
Open
Duplicate Layer
STYLES
ADJUSTMENTS
MASKS
LAYERS
CHANNELS
PATHS
Normal
Opacity: 100%
Fill: 100%
Background copy
Background

Figure 33–5

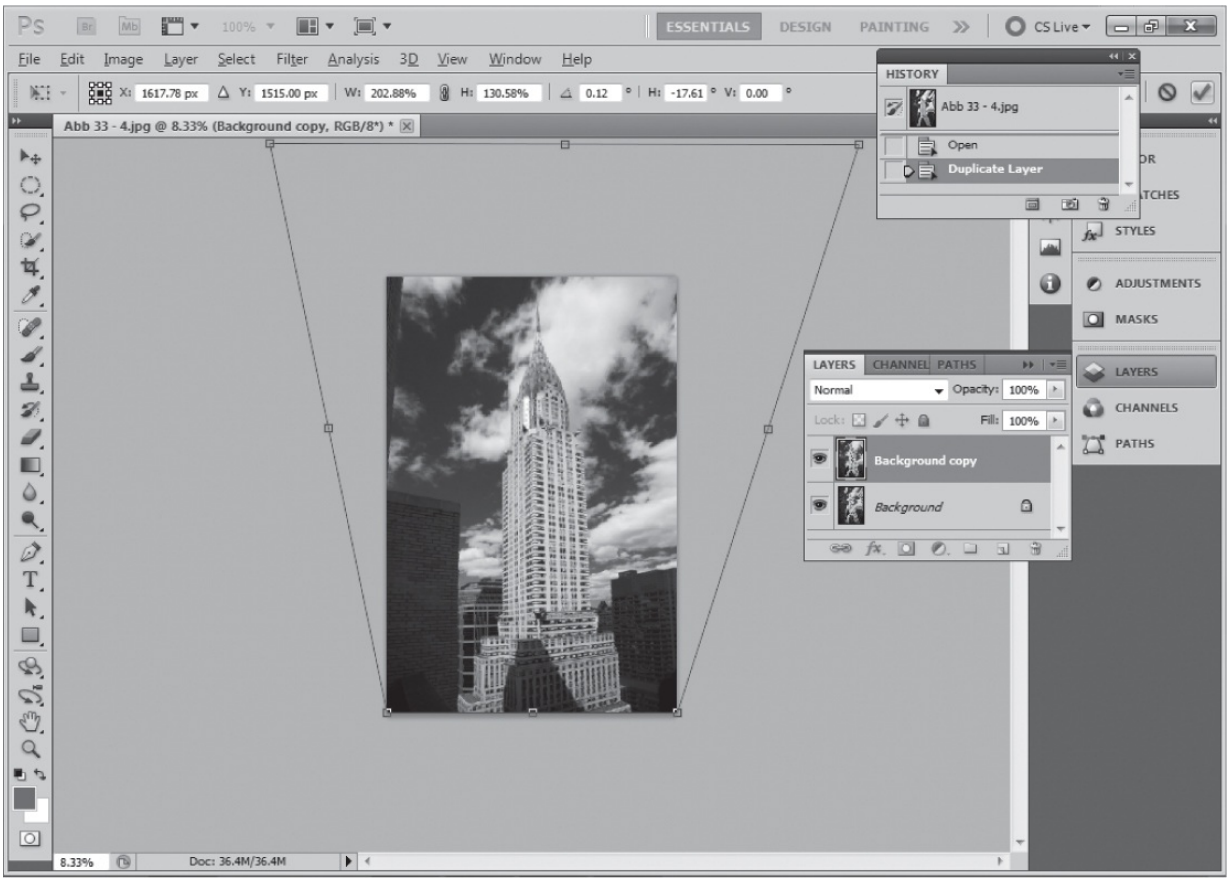


Figure 33–6



Figure 33–7

Another very useful feature of the Transform tool is the Warp option, which allows you to transform the shape of selected objects without affecting the

surrounding pixels. This function works best with organic forms like the one shown in figure 33–8. In order to make this image look as wonderfully minimalist as a Blossfeld or Mapplethorpe plant photograph, I decided to remove the second, out-of-focus bud from the lower-right corner of the frame.

To do this, I once again duplicated the image layer and, this time, selected the Warp option in the Transform menu. The tool superimposes a grid with nine sections onto the image. Each of the corners of the grid and the individual sections can be manipulated separately. Removing the second bud was a simple matter of grabbing the lower-right corner handle and dragging the portion of the image containing the unwanted pixels out of the frame (figure 33–9). I could then manipulate the left-hand side of the lower-right section to counteract the thickening effect the initial warp transformation had on the plant's stem. Clicking the checkmark icon at the right-end of the toolbar completes the operation (figure 33–10).



Figure 33–8

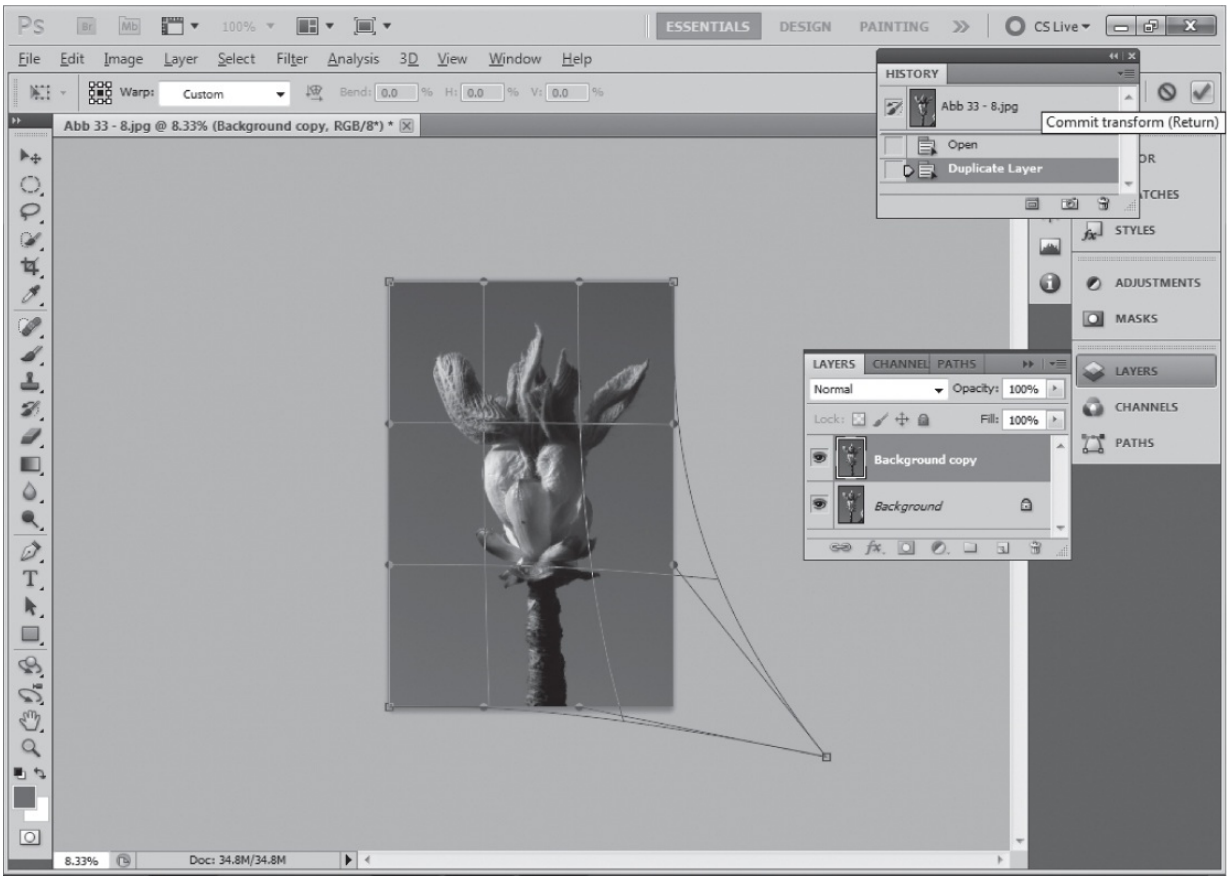


Figure 33–9

Used carefully, Warp effects can also be successfully applied to architectural photos.

Subsequent Sharpening: Yes or No?

Everyone knows that Photoshop can sharpen images after they were taken, but beware that excessive subsequent sharpening often makes a photo look unnatural. When you click Filters > Sharpen, five options are available: Sharpen Edges, Sharpen, Smart Sharpen, Sharpen More, and Unsharp Mask. For high-end correction, I recommend only two options, Smart Sharpen and Unsharp Mask, but before I explain them let's first look at the disadvantages of sharpening. The photo taken on top of the new Westhafen Tower in Frankfurt shows the city's skyline (figure 33–11) with plenty of detail. To demonstrate very clearly the dangers of sharpening, look at a section of your image at 100% and click the Sharpen More tool. In the example, you can now recognize (as opposed to the unsharpened image) white edges along the contours of the

silhouette in the foreground (figure 33–12). These edges are unwanted and allow the experienced viewer to immediately recognize that this is a digital photo, even if a grain layer has been added to it. Pictorial noise is also significantly greater.



Figure 33–10

More suitable is the Unsharp Mask tool. The name does not quite indicate sharpening, but it comes from a technical method employed in analog photography in which an unsharp positive is placed on a sharp negative and then projected onto contrasty paper. A similar result occurs on the computer: Contrast is reduced in large areas of the picture, and those areas become a little softer. In abrupt tone transitions, however, contrast is increased and the overall result is that the photo looks clearly sharper without appearing artificial (figure 33–13).

Another advantage is that several options are available with this tool: Amount, for example, determines to what degree the contrast in areas with abrupt tone transitions should be increased. The standard setting is 50%, recommended for the subsequent sharpening of almost all digital images. The Radius value restricts the width of the area to be sharpened and has been set to one pixel, another recommended standard setting. Finally, the Threshold value can be set for determining the intensity of tone transitions so the filter can be effective in the first place. Its standard setting is 0, which means that the filter

affects all areas of the picture. For example, if you would like to prevent a subject’s skin blemishes from being intensified during sharpening, you can increase the Threshold value, and the filter then leaves softer transitions unchanged. In cases like this, it’s well worth your time to try it out.



Figure 33–11



Figure 33–12



Figure 33–13



Figure 33–14

Even more detailed sharpening alternatives are provided by the Smart Sharpen filter. If you choose the Advanced setting, you can selectively regulate sharpness according to lights and shadows. In this case, you can use the tone width regulator for preventing large areas from being sharpened too and thus stop pictorial noise in the sky, for example, from being increased automatically with the sharpening process.

The Remove options allow you to correct blurred movement or soften sharpness. Don’t expect too much from these functions, however. If the Remove option remains set on the Gaussian Blur, the Smart Sharpen tool will have an effect similar to the Unsharp Mask filter. In this example, the standard setting was selected (figure 33–14).

Remember that it takes longer to work with the Smart Sharpen filter than with the Unsharp Mask filter, and therefore the Smart Sharpen filter is not as useful when processing a large number of pictures. The sharpness performance of a subsequently sharpened image is clearly superior to the impression we get when looking at a print from a small-format slide or negative, and the defenders of the analog bastion will not be able to dispute it. Thus, photos taken with a good digital camera can be easily enlarged to a width of 40 inches and the pixels would still not be visible to the naked eye.

34 Creating Panoramas Using Photomerge

The automated merging of several photos to create a panoramic image still left a lot to be desired in Photoshop CS2 and earlier versions of the program. Fortunately, the tool has been greatly improved since the release of the CS3 version.

Let's compare three photos taken with a focal length of 280 mm from the same location with a tripod. I shot them so the photos would slightly overlap and the buildings would be roughly the same height. The exposures were also identical, and yet the photos have slightly different gray tones. This tonal difference is precisely the type of situation that earlier versions of Photomerge couldn't adequately master (figure 34–1). The seams between the individual source images are clearly visible and the architectural lines in the image are not cleanly joined. The Auto function in Photoshop's Photomerge calculates these same images much better (figure 34–2). The tonal values have been adapted to each other and the architectural lines have been stitched together almost perfectly. By cropping and slightly increasing the contrast in this photo, a quite acceptable panoramic photo (figure 34–3) that did not even need a shift lens, is obtained.

Photoshop is also capable of stitching together images taken without shift lenses that earlier versions of Photomerge refused to tackle. The Mönchehaus Museum of Modern Art in Goslar, Germany, has been photographed here three times (figures 34–4 to 34–6) with the same 17 mm lens from three different locations. In each case, the camera was placed on the tripod at the same distance from the building's façade and was positioned exactly parallel to it. It was also essential for the photos to overlap.



Figure 34–1



Figure 34–2



Figure 34–3



Figure 34–4



Figure 34–5



Figure 34–6



Figure 34–7

First, the photos were stitched together using the Auto function in Photomerge, and the program did a clean job of merging the fine transitions together (see, for example, the curb or the half-timbered architecture in figure 34–7). However, the new perspective reduces image size in the edges, but Photomerge can also adjust for this, so the three photos are woven together parallel to each other and without noticeable changes in perspective. In these images, it works best with the Cylindrical function if the field Reposition Only is checked. A surprisingly clean and good-looking photo is the final result (figure 34–8).

In the image of this narrow street filled with medieval half-timbered houses, the combination of cropping and a slight increase in contrast presents a panoramic photo whose 8,458 × 2,995 pixels (i. e., more than 25 million pixels) would permit a considerable enlargement (figure 34–9). End result: Panoramic photography really benefited from this new release of Photoshop.



Figure 34–8



Figure 34–9

In Closing

I now wish the reader a lot of fun in the creative aspects of black and white photography, which has maintained its relevance and persuasive power even in the digital age!

Torsten Andreas Hoffmann
www.t-a-hoffmann.de

Signed prints from this book can be ordered as premium fine art prints (inkjet prints). Approximate size is 12″×16″. For information on how to order, please contact me at info@t-a-hoffmann.de